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LETTICE ARNOLD.

A TALE.

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A TALE.

BY .

THE AUTHOR OF "EMILIA WYNDHAM,"
"THE WILMINGTONS," &c.

Mrs. Anne Marsh

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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LETTICE ARNOLD.

CHAPTER I.

It is the generous spirit, that, when brought
Unto the task of common life, hath wrought
Even upon the plan which pleased the childish
thought.

* * * * *

Who, doomed to go in company with pain,
And fear, and ruin—miserable train!—
Makes that necessity a glorious gain,
By actions that would force the soul to abate
Her feeling, rendered more compassionate.

* * * * *

More gifted with self-knowledge—even more pure
As tempted more—more able to endure,
As more exposed to suffering and distress;
Thence, also, more alive to tenderness.

WORDSWORTH. *Happy Warrior.*

“No, dearest mother, no! I cannot. What!
after all the tenderness, care, and love, I have

4 Sept 51 1845
New York City
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received from you, for now one and twenty years, to leave you and my father, in your old age, to yourselves! Oh, no! Oh, no!"

"Nay, my child," said the pale, delicate, nervous woman, thus addressed by a blooming girl, whose face beamed with every promise for future happiness which health, and cheerfulness, and eyes filled with warm affections, could give; "Nay, my child, don't talk so. You must not talk so. It is not to be thought of."

And, as she said these words with effort, her poor heart was dying within her, not only from sorrow at the thought of the parting from her darling; but with all sorts of dreary, undefined terrors at the idea of the forlorn deserted life before her. Abandoned to herself and to servants; so fearful, so weak as she was, and with the poor invalided and crippled veteran her husband, a martyr to that long train of sufferings which honourable wounds, received in the service of country, too often leave behind them,—A man at all times so

difficult to soothe, so impossible to entertain—and old age creeping upon them both. The little strength she ever had diminishing; the little spirit she ever possessed failing; what should she do without this dear, animated; this loving, clever being, who was, in one word, everything to her?

Yet she held to her resolution,—no martyr ever more courageously than did this trembling, timid woman. A prey to ten thousand imaginary fears—and, let alone the imaginary fears, placed in a position where the help she was now depriving herself of was really so greatly needed! But what will not the strong love of a mother do?

“No, my dear,” the mother repeated, “don’t think of it;—don’t speak of it. You distress me very much. Pray don’t, my dearest Catherine.”

“But I should be a shocking creature, mamma, to forsake you. And I am sure Edgar would despise me as much as I should

despise myself, if I could think of it. I cannot—I ought not to leave you.”

The gentle blue eye of Mrs. Melwyn was fixed upon the daughter’s generous, glowing face. She smothered a sigh, and waited a while to steady her faltering voice.

She wished to hide, if possible, from her daughter, the extent of the sacrifice she was making.

At last she recovered herself sufficiently to speak with composure, and then she said :—

“To accept such a sacrifice from a child, I have always thought the most monstrous piece of selfishness of which a parent could be guilty. My love, this trial does not come upon me unexpectedly. I have, of course, anticipated it. I knew my sweet girl could not be long known and seen without inspiring and returning the attachment of some valuable man. I have resolved—and God strengthen me in this resolve,”—she cast up a silent appeal to the fountain of strength and courage

—"that nothing should tempt me to what I consider so base, as conduct such as my own Catherine would tempt me to, would, in my poor opinion be. What! a parent accept the sacrifice of a whole life in exchange for the poor remnant of her own! A parent who has had her own portion of the joys of youth in her day, deprive a child of a share in her turn! No, my dearest love, never—never! I would die, and I *will* die first."

But it was not death that she feared. It was not the idea of death that appalled her. Weak as were her nerves, delicate as was her frame, she had escaped that dread, among the many evils which flesh, susceptible to every impression as hers was, is heir to. What she dreaded was melancholy.

She knew the unsoundness of her own nerves. She had often felt herself, as it were, trembling upon the fearful verge of reason, when the mind, unable to support itself, is forced to rest upon another. She had known

a feeling, common to many very nervous people, I believe, as though her mind must inevitably be overset when pressed far, if it were not helped, strengthened, and cheered by some more wholesome mind; and she shrank appalled from the prospect.

But even these terrors, great as they confessedly are, and peculiarly great in the instance before us, could not make her waver in her resolution. She was a generous, just, disinterested woman; though the exigencies of a most delicate constitution, and most susceptible nervous system, had too often exposed her, from those who did not understand such things, to the reproach of being a tiresome, whimsical hypochondriac;—from those whose iron nerves, and vigorous spirits, rendered sympathy in such distresses impossible.

Poor thing, she knew this but too well. It was the difficulty of making herself understood; the want of sympathy—the impossibility of rendering needs, most urgent in her

case, comprehensible by her friends, which had added so greatly to that timorous cowardice, that fear of circumstances—of changes—which had been the bane of her existence.

And, therefore, this kind, animated, affectionate daughter, whose tenderness seemed never to weary in the task of cheering her ; whose activity was never exhausted in the endeavour to assist and serve her ; whose good sense and spirit kept everything right at home, and more especially kept those terrible things, the servants, in order—of whom the poor mother, like many other feeble and languid people, was so foolishly afraid ;—therefore, this kind daughter was as the very spring of her existence ; and the idea of parting with her was really dreadful. Yet she hesitated not. So did that man behave, who stood firm upon the rampart till he had finished his observation, though his hair turned white with fear. Mrs. Melwyn was an heroic coward of this kind.

She had prayed ardently, fervently, that day, for courage, for resolution to complete the dreaded sacrifice, and she had found it.

“ Oh, Lord ! I am thy servant. Do with me what thou wilt. Trembling in spirit, the victim of my infirmity, a poor, selfish, cowardly being, I fall down before Thee. Thou hast showed me what is right, the sacrifice I ought to make. Oh, give me strength in my weakness to be faithful to complete it ! ”

Thus had she prayed. And now, resolved in heart, the poor sinking spirit failing her within ; but, as I said, steadying her voice with an almost heroic constancy, she resisted her grateful and pious child's representation : “ I have told Edgar,—dear as he is to me, strong as are the claims his generous affection gives him over me,—that I will not, I cannot forsake you.”

“ You must not call it forsake,” said the mother, gently. “ My love, the Lord of life himself has spoken it : ‘ Therefore shall a man

leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.' ”

“ And so he is ready to do,” cried Catherine, eagerly.

“ Yes, mother, he desires nothing better—he respects my scruples—he has offered, dear Edgar! to abandon his profession, and come and live here, and help me to take care of you and my father. Was not that beautiful?” and the tears stood in her eyes.

“ Beautiful,—generous,—devoted! My Catherine will be a happy woman,” and the mother smiled. A ray of genuine pleasure warmed her beating heart. This respect for the filial scruples of her he loved, was indeed beautiful in the gay handsome young officer. But the mother knew his disposition too well to listen to this proposal, even for a moment.

“ And abandon his profession? No, my sweet child, that would never, never do.”

“ But he says he is independent of his profession—that his private fortune, though not

large, is enough for such simple, moderate people as he and I are. In short, that he shall be miserable without me, and all that charming stuff, mamma,—and that he loves me the better, for what he calls, dear fellow, my piety to you. And so, dear mother, he says if you and my father will but consent to take him in, he will do his very best in helping me to make you comfortable ; and he is so sweet-tempered, so reasonable, so good, so amiable, I am quite sure he would keep his promise, mamma.” And she looked anxiously into her mother’s face, waiting for an answer.

The temptation was very, very strong.

Again those domestic spectres which had so appalled her poor timorous spirit rose before her. A desolate, dull fireside—her own tendency to melancholy—her poor maimed, suffering, and alas, too often peevish partner—her encroaching, unmanageable servants. The cook, with her careless, saucy ways—the butler

so indifferent and negligent, and her own maid Randall—that Randall, who in secret tyrannised over her—exercising the empire of fear to an extent of which Catherine, alive as she was to these evils, had no idea. And again Mrs. Melwyn asked herself, if these things were so disagreeable now, when Catherine was here to take care of her, what would they become when she should be left alone?

And then such a sweet picture of happiness presented itself to tempt her—Catherine settled there—settled there, at the Hazles for ever. That handsome, lively young man, with his sweet cordial ways and polite observance of every one, sitting by their hearth, and talking, as he was used to do, to the General, of old days and military matters—the only subjects in which this aged military man took any real interest,—reading the newspaper to him, and making such lively, pleasant comments as he read! How should *she* ever get through the debates, with her breath so short,

and her voice so indistinct and low? The General would lose all patience—he hated to hear her attempt to read such things, and always, when he could, got Catherine or the young Lieutenant-Colonel to do it.

Oh! it was a sore temptation; but this poor, dear, good creature resisted it.

“My love,” she said, after a little pause, during which this noble victory was achieved—laugh if you will at me for the expression, but it *was* a noble victory over self;—“my love,” she said, “don’t tempt your poor mother beyond her strength. Gladly, gladly, as far as we are concerned, would we enter into this arrangement; but it must not be. No, Catherine; Edgar must not quit his profession. It would not only be a very great sacrifice I am sure now, but it would lay the foundation of endless regrets in future. No, my darling girl, neither his happiness nor your happiness shall be ever sacrificed to mine. A life against a few uncertain years! No—no.”

The mother was inflexible. The more these good children offered to give up for her sake, the more she resolved to suffer no such sacrifice to be made.

Edgar could not but rejoice. He was an excellent young fellow, and excessively in love with the charming Catherine, you may be sure, or he never would have thought of offering to abandon a profession in which he had distinguished himself highly, for her sake.—A profession which opened to him the fairest prospects, and of which he was especially fond,—but he was not sorry to be excused. He had resolved upon this sacrifice; for there is something in those who truly love, and whose love is elevated almost to adoration by the moral worth they have observed in the chosen one, which revolts at the idea of lowering the tone of that enthusiastic goodness and self-immolation to principle which has so enchanted them. Edgar could not do it. He could not attempt to persuade this tender,

generous daughter, to consider her own welfare and his, in preference to that of her parents. He could only offer, on his own part, to make the greatest sacrifice which could have been demanded from him. Rather than part from her what would he not do? Everything was possible but that.

However, when the mother positively refused to accept of this act of self-abnegation, I cannot say that he regretted it; or that he used any very strenuous arguments to persuade Catherine to persist in her proposal. No, he thought Mrs. Melwyn quite right in deciding as she had done; and he felt his affection for herself, and his respect both for her character and understanding, very much increased by this unexpected proof of courage and good sense.

That night Mrs. Melwyn was very, very low indeed. And when she went up into her dressing-room, and Catherine had kissed her tenderly, and with a heart quite divided between anxiety for her mother, and a sense of happiness upon her own account, that would make itself felt in spite of all, had retired to her room ; the mother sat down, poor thing, in the most comfortable arm-chair that ever was invented, but which imparted no comfort to her ; and placing herself before a merry blazing fire, which was reflected from all sorts of cheerful pretty things with which the dressing-room was adorned ; her feet upon a warm, soft footstool of Catherine's own working, her elbow resting upon her knee, and her head upon her hand, she, with her eyes bent mournfully upon the fire, began crying very much. And so she sat for a long time, thinking and crying—very sorrowful, but not in the least repenting. She could not, however, help meditating upon all sorts of dismal things—

seeing everything in the blackest possible light; and her heart was filled with all kinds of melancholy forebodings, as to how it would, and must inevitably be, when dear, dear Catherine was really gone. She sank at last into a deep sorrowful reverie, and sat quite absorbed in her own thoughts, till she—who was extremely punctual in her hour of going to bed, for reasons best known to herself, though never confided to any human being—namely, that her maid disliked very much sitting up for her—quite forgot the hour. She started as the clock in the hall sounded eleven and two quarters, and almost with the trepidation of a chidden child, rose and rang the bell. Nobody came. This made her still more uneasy. It was Randall's custom not to answer her mistress' bell the first time, when she was cross. And poor Mrs. Melwyn dreaded few things in this world more than cross looks from those about her, especially from Randall; and that Randall knew perfectly well.

“She must be fallen asleep in her chair, poor thing. It was very thoughtless of me,” Mrs. Melwyn did *not* say, but would have said, if people ever did speak to themselves aloud.

Even in this sort of mute soliloquy she did not venture to say, “Randall will be very ill-tempered and unreasonable.” But after waiting a respectful length of time, in a state of much mental self-reproach and fear of consequences, she ventured, with considerable hesitation, to repeat the summons, and—ring again.

But it was not even then till after a proper space of time had been yielded to the claims of offended dignity, that it pleased Mrs. Randall to make her appearance.

“I am very sorry, Randall.—Really I had no idea how late it was.—I was thinking about Miss Catherine, and I missed it when it struck ten.—I had not the least idea it was so late,” began the mistress, in an apologetic

tone, to which Randall vouchsafed not an answer, but looked like a thunder cloud, as she went banging up and down the room, opening and shutting drawers with a loud noise, and treading with a rough, heavy step; two things particularly annoying, as she very well knew, to the sensitive nerves of her mistress. But Randall settled it with herself—that as her mistress had kept her out of bed an hour and a half longer than usual, for no reason at all but just to please herself, she should find she was none the better for it.

The poor mistress bore all this with patience for some time. She would have gone on bearing the roughness and the noise, however disagreeable, as long as Randall so pleased; but her soft heart could not bear those glum cross looks, and this alarming silence.

“I was thinking of Miss Catherine’s marriage, Randall. That was what made me forget the hour.—What shall I do without her?”

“Do without her! What will you do without her! What other people do, I suppose,” said the insolent abigail. “Yes, that’s just like it; nothing ever can content some people, I think. Most ladies would be glad to have settled their daughters so well; but some folk must make a crying matter of everything. It would be well for poor servants, when they’re sitting over the fire, their bones aching to death for very weariness, if *they’d* something as pleasant to think about. They wouldn’t be crying for nothing, and keeping all the world out of their beds, like those who care for nought but how to please themselves.”

Part of this was said, part muttered, part thought; and the poor timid mistress—one of whose domestic occupations it seemed to be to study the humours of her servants—heard a portion, and divined the rest.

“Well, Randall, I don’t quite hear all you are saying,” at last she mustered courage to

say, "and perhaps it is as well I do not; but I wish you would give me my things and make haste, for I'm really very tired, and I want to go to bed."

"People can't make more haste than they can."

And so it went on. The maid-servant never relaxing an atom of her offended dignity—continuing to look as ill-humoured, and to do everything as disagreeably as she possibly could—and her poor victim, by speaking from time to time in an anxious, most gentle, and almost flattering manner, hoping to mollify her dependant;—but all in vain.

"I'll teach her to keep me up again for nothing at all," thought Randall.

Whilst "Oh! how foolish it was of me to forget the clock," and "Oh! I never will be so thoughtless as to do it again," was mentally ejaculated by her penitent mistress.

At last the poor lady, very miserable and disconsolate in the midst of all her luxuries,

gained her comfortable bed, and lay there not able to sleep for very discomposure of mind; whilst the abigail retired to her own warm apartment, where she was greeted with a pleasant fire, by which stood a little nice chocolate, simmering, which she had prepared to solace and refresh herself with after the fatigue of putting her mistress to bed; and then she retired to her downy couch, in the full enjoyment of *victorious ill-humour*, and all the sweets of revenge. For she had been dreadfully ill-used, it was true; but then she had been dreadfully out of temper, and had paid her mistress off one while, at least, for the fearful hardship she had inflicted. No hardship on earth sure could equal that she endured,—forced to sit up in consequence of another's whim, when she wanted so sadly to be in her bed.

Whilst, thus, all that the most abundant possession of the world's goods and comforts could bestow was marred by the weakness of the mistress upon one hand, and the ill-temper of the maid upon the other—the plentiful gifts of fortune rendered valueless by this erroneous facility upon one side, and this insolent love of domination upon that; how many in the large metropolis, only a few miles distant, and of which the innumerable lights might be seen brightening, like an Aurora, the southern sky;—how many laid down their heads supperless that night! Stretched upon miserable pallets, and ignorant where food was to be found on the morrow to satisfy the cravings of hunger; yet, in the midst of their misery, more miserable, still because they, like their more fortunate fellow creatures, were not exempt from those worst pests of existence,—their own faults and infirmities.

Yet, in spite of this, how many poor creatures *did* actually lay down their heads that

night far less miserable than poor Mrs. Melwyn.

The tyranny of a servant is noticed by the wise man, if I recollect right, as one of the most irritating and insupportable of mortal miseries.

We will now, if you please, leave this abode of ease and opulence, and poor Mrs. Melwyn restless and dissatisfied with herself, tossing and turning upon her muslin-trimmed pillow, and visit one of the neglected streets of our great city, enter an obscure lodging-house, and see how it went with some inmates that we shall find there.

Two young women inhabited one small room of about ten feet by eight, in the upper story of a set of houses somewhere near Marylebone-street. These houses appear to have

been once intended for rather substantial persons, but have gradually sunk into lodging-houses for the very poor. The premises look upon an old grave-yard, a dreary prospect enough, but perhaps preferable to a close street, and are in general filled with decent though very poor people. Every room appears to serve a whole family, and few of the rooms are much larger than the one I have described.

It was now half-past twelve o'clock, and still the miserable dip tallow candle burned in a dilapidated tin candlestick. The wind whistled with that peculiar wintry sound which betokens that snow is falling; it was very, very cold—the fire was out, and the girl who sat plying her needle by the hearth,—where it was still a little warmer than throughout the rest of the room,—had wrapped up her feet in an old worn-out piece of flannel, and had an old black silk wadded cloak thrown over her to keep her from being almost

perished. The chamber was scantily furnished, and bore an air of extreme poverty, amounting almost to absolute destitution. One by one the little articles of property possessed by its inmates had disappeared to supply the calls of urgent want. An old four-post bedstead, with curtains of worn-out serge, stood in one corner ; one mattress, with two small thin pillows and a bolster that was almost flat, three old blankets, cotton sheets of the coarsest description, were upon it : three rush-bottomed chairs, an old claw-table, a very ancient, dilapidated chest of drawers, at the top of which were a few battered band-boxes, —a miserable bit of carpet before the fireplace, a wooden box for coals ; a little low tin fender, a poker, or rather half a poker, a shovel and tongs, much the worse for wear, and a very few kitchen utensils, comprised all the furniture in the room. What there was, however, was kept clean ; the floor was clean, the yellow paint was clean, and I forgot to

say, there was a washing-tub set aside in one corner.

The wind blew shrill, and shook the window, and the snow was heard beating against the panes ; the clock went another quarter, but still the indefatigable toiler sewed on. Now and then she lifted up her head, as a sigh proceeded from that corner of the room where the bed stood, and some one might be heard turning and tossing uneasily upon the mattress,—then she returned to her occupation, and plied her needle with increased assiduity.

The workwoman was a girl of from eighteen to twenty, rather below the middle size, and of a face and form little adapted to figure in a story—one, whose life, in all probability, would never be diversified by those romantic adventures which *real* life in general reserves to the beautiful and the highly-gifted. Her features were rather homely, her hair of a light brown, *without* golden threads through it, her hands and arms rough and red with

cold and labour, and her dress ordinary was to a degree.—Her clothes were of the cheapest materials,—but then these clothes were so neat, so carefully mended where they had given way ; the hair was so smooth, and so closely and neatly drawn round the face, and the face itself had such a sweet expression, that all the defects of line and colour were more than redeemed to the lover of character in countenance, rather than beauty.

In describing the character of that countenance, I shall not use the word patient, not even that of resigned. She was patient and she was resigned, but it was not this that was pre-eminently expressed in her face. Cheerful it cannot be said that she exactly *could* look—she looked earnest, composed, busy, and exceedingly kind. It would almost seem as if she had never, in the midst of her privations, thought enough of herself to call for the full exercise of what may be strictly called the virtues of patience and resignation.

She was so much occupied with the sufferings of others, that she never seemed to think of her own. She was, indeed, naturally of the most cheerful, hopeful temper in the world—those people without selfishness usually are. And though sorrow had a little lowered the tone of her spirits to more than their constitutional composure, and want and disappointment had faded the bright colours of hope upon her cheek ; still hope was not entirely gone, nor cheerfulness utterly exhausted. But the predominant expression of every word and look, and tone and gesture, was kindness—inexhaustible kindness.

I said she lifted up her head from time to time, as a sigh proceeded from the bed, and its suffering inhabitant tossed and tossed, and turned and turned again : and at last she broke silence, and said, “ Poor Myra, can’t you get to sleep ? ”

“ It is so fearfully cold,” was the reply ; “ and when *will* you have done, and come to bed ? ”

“One quarter of an hour more, and I shall have finished it. Poor Myra, you are so nervous, you never can get to sleep till all is shut up—but have patience, dear, one little quarter of an hour, and then I will throw my clothes over your feet, and I hope you will be a little warmer.”

A sigh for all answer; and then she who ought to be, according to all rule, the *true* heroine,—for she was extremely beautiful, or rather had been, poor thing, for she was too wan and wasted to be beautiful now,—lifted up her head, from which fell a profusion of the fairest hair in the world, and leaning her head upon her arm, watched, in a sort of impatient patience, the progress of the indefatigable needle-woman.

“One o’clock striking, and you hav’nt done yet, Lettice! How slowly you *do* get on.”

“I cannot work fast and neatly too, dear Myra. I cannot get through as some do—I wish I could. But my hands are not so deli-

cate and nimble as yours, such swelled, clumsy things," she said, laughing a little, as she looked at them—swelled, indeed, and all mottled over with the cold! "I cannot get over the ground nimbly and well at the same time; some people seem like fine race-horses—I am a poor little drudging pony; but I will make as much haste as I possibly can."

Myra once more uttered an impatient, fretful sigh, and sank down again, saying, "My feet are so dreadfully cold!"

"Take this bit of flannel, then, and let me wrap them up."

"Nay, but you will want it."

"Oh, I have only five minutes more to stay, and I can wrap the carpet round my feet."

And she laid down her work and went to the bed, and wrapped her sister's delicate, but now icy feet, in the flannel; and then she sat down, and toiled and toiled, till at last the task was finished. And oh, how glad she was

to creep to that mattress, hard as it was, and to lay her aching limbs down upon it! Hard it might be, and wretched the pillows and bolster, and scanty the covering, but little felt she such inconveniences. She fell asleep almost immediately, whilst her sister still tossed and murmured. Presently Lettice, for Lettice it was, awakened a little and said, "What is it, love? Poor, poor Myra! Oh, that you could but sleep as I do."

And then she drew her own little pillow from under her head, and put it under her sister's, and tried to make her more comfortable; and she partly succeeded, and at last the poor, delicate, suffering creature fell asleep, and then Lettice slumbered like a baby.

CHAPTER II.

Oh, blest with temper whose unclouded ray
Can make to-morrow cheerful as to-day ;
* * * And can hear
Sighs for a sister with unwounded ear.

POPE. *Characters of Women.*

EARLY in the morning, before it was light, whilst the wintry twilight gleamed through the curtainless window, Lettice was up, dressing herself by the scanty gleam cast from the street lamps into the room, for she could not afford the extravagance of a candle.

She combed and did up her hair with

modest neatness ; put on her brown stuff *only* gown, and then, going to the chest of drawers, opened one with great precaution,—lest she should make a noise and disturb Myra, who still slumbered,—drew out a shawl, and began to fold it as if to put it on.

Alas, poor thing ! as she spread it out for this purpose, she became first aware that the thread-bare, time-worn fabric had given way in two places. Had it been in one, she might have contrived to conceal the injuries of age,—but it was in two.

She turned it this way and that ; she folded and unfolded,—it would not do. The miserable shawl seemed to come to pieces, as the servants say, in her hands. It was already so excessively shabby that she was ashamed to go out in it ; and it seemed as if it would really no longer hold together,—this dingy, thin, brown, red, and green, old shawl ! Mend it would not ; besides, she was pressed for time ; so, with the appearance of

considerable reluctance, she put her hand into the drawer, and took out another shawl.

This was a different affair. It was a warm and not very old plaid shawl, of various colours, well preserved and clean looking; and this cold morning *so* tempting.

Should she borrow it? Myra was still asleep,—but she would be horridly cold when she got up, and she would want her shawl perhaps; but then Lettice must go out, and must be decent,—and there seemed no help for it.

But if she took the shawl, had she not better light the fire before she went out? Myra would be so chilly. But then, Myra seldom got up till half-past eight or nine, and it was now not seven.

An hour and a half's, perhaps two hours', useless fire, according to her habit of nice economical calculation, would never do. So after a little deliberation, Lettice contented herself with "laying it," as the housemaids

say,—that is, preparing the fire to be lighted with a match; and as she took out coal by coal to do this, she perceived with terror how very, very low, the little store of fuel was.

“We must have a bushel in to-day,” she said. “Better without meat and drink than fire, in such weather as this.”

However, she was cheered with the reflection, that she should get a little more than usual by the work that she had last night finished. It had been ordered by a considerate and benevolent lady, who instead of going to the ready-made linen warehouses for what she wanted, gave herself a good deal of trouble to get at the poor workwomen themselves who supplied these houses, in order that they might receive the full price of their needlework,—which otherwise must of necessity be divided between them and the shop-keeper.

How much she should get she did not quite know, for she had never worked for this lady

before; but she always got more from private customers than from the shops, though she had learned by experience how some ladies, and affluent, and great ladies too, were in the habit of beating down the needlewomen they employed to the last penny, and giving as little as they possibly could for their labours.

I do not mean to say that *much* more than the current price for such matters people can habitually give; they should, however, beware of driving hard bargains with the very poor.

Her bonnet, too, looked dreadfully shabby, as poor little Lettice took it out from one of the dilapidated band-boxes that stood upon the chest of drawers,—yet it had been carefully covered with a sheet of paper, to guard it from the injuries of the dust and the smoke-loaded air.

The young girl held it upon her hand,

turning it round, and looking at it, and she could not help sighing when she thought of the miserably shabby appearance she should make; and she, going to a private house too,—and upon such an errand!—For, it was fine linen for the trousseau of a grand young lady just about to be married, upon which she had been so busily employed.

What a contrast it was that the busy imagination *would* draw between all the fine things that young lady was to have and her own destitution! She must needs be what she was,—a simple-hearted, God-fearing, generous girl—to whom envious comparisons of others with herself were as impossible as any other faults of the selfish—not to feel as if the difference was, to use the common word of common people upon such occasions, “very hard.”

But she did not take it so. She did not think that it was very *hard* that others should be happy and have plenty, because she was

poor and had nothing. They had not robbed *her*. What they had was not taken from *her*. Nay, just at this moment their wealth was actually overflowing towards her. She was really and essentially the better off, because others had something to expend upon the superfluities of life, and especially upon the delicate and beautiful needlework of her careful and indefatigable hand. In her little sphere, she gained in a measure by the general prosperity, the crumbs of the plentiful table at least fell to her share. Better have this, than have nothing, better wait here, than beside a table where there was but just enough and barely enough for each individual guest. Lettice, it is certain, did not make these general reflections, but as she was not in the least envious of other people's good fortune, it was not necessary that she should. It was not necessary in order to make her witness the happiness of others without pain, to show her that after all she was a personal gainer in it.

She was not a drawer of jealous comparisons, not she.

Still I do not pretend that the thought of the increased pay she was likely to receive did not at that moment come in aid of her good and simple-hearted feelings,—as she brightened up, and shook her bonnet, and pulled out the ribbons, and made it look as tidy as she could; bethinking herself that if it possibly could be done, when she got her money, she would buy a bit of black ribbon, and make it a little more spruce.

And now the bonnet is on, and she does not think it looks so *very* bad,—and Myra's shawl, as reflected in the little threepenny glass, looks quite neat. Now she steals to the bed in order to make her apologies to Myra about the shawl and fire, but Myra still slumbers. It is half-past seven and more, and she must be gone.

The young lady for whom she had made the linen lived about twenty miles from town,

but she had come up about her things, and was to set off on her return home at nine o'clock that very morning. The linen had been ordered to be sent in the night before, but Lettice had found it impossible to get it finished. She had been obliged, *perforce*, to wait till the ensuing morning before she could carry it home. Her object now was to arrive at the house so soon as the servants should be stirring, that there might be time for the things to be packed up and be in readiness to accompany the young lady upon her return home.

Now, Lettice is in the street. Oh, what a morning it was! The wind was intensely cold,—the snow was blown in buffets against her face; the street was slippery;—all the mud and mire turned into inky-looking ice. She could scarcely stand—her face was blue with the cold—her hands, in a pair of cotton gloves, so numbed that she could hardly hold the parcel she carried.

She had no umbrella. The snow beat upon her undefended head, and completed the demolition of the poor bonnet; but she comforted herself with the thought that its shabby appearance would now be attributed to the bad weather having spoiled it. Nay,—and she smiled as the idea presented itself,—was it not possible that she might be supposed to have a better bonnet at home?

So she cheerfully made her way through many a long, dirty, splashy street, till at last she entered Grosvenor Square. The lamps were just dying away before the splendid houses, and the wintry twilight discovered the garden, with its trees plastered with dirty snow, whilst the wind rushed down from the Park colder and bitterer than ever. She could hardly get along at all. A few ragged, good-for-nothing boys were almost the only people yet to be seen about; and they laughed and mocked at her, as, holding her bonnet down with one hand, to prevent its absolutely giving

way before the wind, she endeavoured to carry her parcel, and keep her shawl from flying up, with the other.

The jeers and the laughter were very uncomfortable to her. The things she found it the most difficult to reconcile herself to in her fallen state were the scoffs, and the scorns, and the coarse jests of those once so far, far beneath her—so far beneath her, indeed, that their very existence, as a class, had been once almost unknown, and yet who were now little, if at all, worse off than herself.

The rude brutality, of the coarse, uneducated, and unimproved Saxon, is a terrible grievance to those forced to come into close quarters with such. And I quite agree with Mr. Kay in what he says in that valuable book of his, "The Social Position of the People," as to the great desirableness, if not absolute necessity of correcting this species of brutality—among other still more important things which need correction—by a very much better understood system of

education than we are at present giving to our poor.

But to return to our Lettice, who has, in spite of all difficulties and all humiliations, at last entered Green Street, and having raised the knocker, has given one timid, humble, subdued knock at the door of a moderate-sized house, upon the right hand side as you go up to the Park.

At this house, as you will surmise, lived the benevolent lady of whom I have spoken, as one who took so much trouble to break through the barriers, which in London separate the employers and the employed! She strove to assist the poor stitchers of her own sex, by doing away with the call for the existence of that hand, or those many hands,—through which their ware has usually to pass, and in each of which something of the recompense thereof must of necessity be detained.

Lettice had never been at the house before; but she had sometimes had to go to other

genteel houses, and she had too often found the insolence of the pampered domestics there residing, in the midst of their own wasteful and unprincipled luxury, far harder to bear than even the rude incivility of the streets.

So she stood upon the steps, feeling very uncomfortable ; still more afraid of the effect that her bonnet might produce upon the man that should open the door, than it might be expected to do upon his superiors.

But, "like master, like man," is a stale old proverb, which, like many other old saws of our now despised as *childish* ancestors, is full of pith and truth.

The servant who appeared was a grave, grey-haired man, of somewhat above fifty. He stooped a little in his gait, and had *not* a very fashionable air ; but his countenance was full of kind meaning, and his manner so gentle, that it seemed respectful even to a poor girl like this.

Before hearing her errand, [observing how cold she looked, he bade her come in and warm herself at the hall stove ; and bringing her into the little snug vestibule, where a bright fire was already blazing, he shut the door in the face of the chill blast, that came rushing forward as if to force its way into the house, and then returned to her, and asked her errand.

“I come with the young lady’s work.— I was so sorry that I could not possibly get it done in time to send it in last night ; but I hope I have not put her to any inconvenience. I hope her trunks are not made up. I started almost before it was light this morning.”

“Well, my dear, I hope there’s not much amiss ; but it was a pity you could not get it done last night. Mrs. Danvers likes people to be exact to the moment, and punctual in performing promises, you must know. However, I’ll take it up without loss of time, and I dare say it will be all right.”

"Is it come at last?" asked a sweet, low voice, as Reynolds entered the drawing-room. "My love, I really began to be frightened for your pretty things," the speaker went on, turning to a young lady who was making an early breakfast before a noble, blazing fire, and who was no other a person than Catherine Melwyn.

"Oh, madam! I was not in the least uneasy about them, I was quite sure they would come sooner or later."

"I wish, my love," said Mrs. Danvers, sitting down by the fire, "I could have shared in your security. Poor creatures! the temptation is sometimes so awfully great. The pawnbroker is dangerously near.—So easy to evade all enquiry by changing one miserably obscure lodging for another, into which it is almost impossible to be traced.—And, to tell the truth, I had not used you quite well in this instance, my dear; for I happened to know nothing of the previous character of these poor girls, but that they were certainly

very neat workwomen. They seemed so out of all measure poor, that I could not help yielding to the immediate temptation, and recommending them for your work at once, without making the proper enquiries; and the knowledge of this had, I confess, made me rather fidgetty till the work safely arrived. And thus you see, my love, that the having yielded to temptation myself has had its usual effect of making me suspicious of the power of temptation over others."

Mrs. Danvers had once been one of the loveliest women that had ever been seen: the face of an angel, the form of the Goddess of Beauty herself; manners the softest, the most delightful, had been united to a gaiety of spirit, a warm ardour of heart, a liveliness of fancy, and a quickness of perception which had rendered her the delight of every society in which she moved. She had been celebrated for the elegance of her dress and equipage, as much as for the brilliance of her wit and

the fascination of her beauty, and the whole was set off by a sweetness of countenance and a voice of such harmonious softness that it made its way to every heart.

Of all this loveliness the soft countenance and the sweet harmonious voice alone remained. Yet had the sad eclipse of so many charms been succeeded by a something so holy, so saint-like, so tender, that the being who stood now shorn by sorrow and suffering of all her earthly perfections, seemed only to have become a fitter denizen for heaven by the exchange.

Her life had indeed been one shipwreck, in which all she prized had gone down. Husband, children, parents, sister, brother, —all!—every one gone. It had been a fearful ruin. It was thought impossible by her friends that she should be able to survive this wreck of earthly joy,—but she had lived on. She stood there, an example of the triumph of those three,—faith, hope, and

charity ; [but the greatest of these was charity.

In faith, she had rested upon the “unseen,” and the world of things “seen” around her had shrunk into insignificance. In hope, she looked forward to that day when tears should be wiped from all faces, and the lost and severed should meet once more never to part again. In charity—in other words, love—she filled that aching, desolate heart with fresh affections, still warm and tender, if wanting the joyous gladness of earlier days.

Every sorrowing human being, every poor sufferer, be they who they might, or whence they might, found a place in that compassionate heart. No wonder it was filled to overflowing:—there are so many sorrowing sufferers in this world.

She went about doing good. Her whole life was one act of pity.

Her house was plainly furnished. The “mutton chops with a few greens and pota-

toes,"—laughed at in a recent trial, as if indifference to one's own dinner were a crime—might have done for a specimen of her way of going on: She often was no better served. Her once elegant dress was conventual in its simplicity. Every farthing she could save upon herself was saved for her poor.

You must please to recollect that she stood perfectly alone in the world, and that there was not a human creature that could suffer by this exercise of a sublime and universal charity. Such peculiar devotion to one object is only permitted to those whom God has severed from their kind, and marked out, as it were, for the generous career.

Her days were passed in visiting all those dismal places in this great city, where lowly want "repairs to die," or where degradation and depravity, the children of want, hide themselves. She sat by the bed of the inmate of the hospital, pouring the soft balm of her consolations upon the suffering and lowly.

And she might be followed to the prison, endeavouring under the thick covering of depravity and guilt, to touch that heart—which, as a good man once said—“exists in every human being, so that one can but find the way to it.” In such places her presence was hailed as the first and greatest of blessings. Every one was melted, or was awed into good behaviour by her presence. The most hardened of brandy-drinking nurses was softened and amended by her example. The most stupid and brutal of criminals felt as it were a dawn of glimmering light, and a balm as of morning dew upon his soul, as she talked with him.

The situation of the young women who have to gain their livelihood by their needle had peculiarly excited her compassion, and to their welfare she had especially devoted herself. Her rank and position in society gave her a ready access to many fine ladies who had an immensity to be done for them: and to many

fine dress-makers who had this immensity to do.

She was indefatigable in her exertions to diminish the evils to which the young ladies—"improvers," I believe, is the technical term—are in too many of these establishments exposed. She it was who got the work-rooms properly ventilated, and properly warmed. She it was who insisted upon the cruelty and the wretchedness of keeping up these poor girls hour after hour from their natural rest, till their strength was exhausted; the very means by which they were to earn their bread taken away; and they at length abandoned to decline and starvation. She made fine ladies learn to allow more time for the preparation of their dresses; and fine ladies' dressmakers to learn to say, "No."

One of the great objects of her exertions was to save the poor plain-sewers from the necessary loss occasioned by the middle-man. She did not decide whether the shops exacted

too much labour, or not, for their pay; with so great a competition for work, and so much always lying unsold upon their boards, it was difficult to say. But she spared no trouble to get these poor women employed direct by those who wanted sewing done; and she taught those indolent fine ladies who, rather than give themselves a little trouble to increase a poor creature's gains, preferred going to the ready-made shops,—“because the other was such a bore,” to feel rather ashamed of themselves.

It was during one of her visits in the parish of Marylebone, that she had accidentally met with these two sisters, Lettice Arnold and Myra. Accustomed as she had been to every degree of misery, there was something in them both that struck her more than usual. In spite of their squalid dress and miserable chamber, a something which seemed to prove them of no common stamp. They seemed belonging to those who have known much better days. Being however pressed for time, she had not at that moment been able to learn the details of their

history ; which, on the part of one of them, at least, there seemed some unwillingness to tell.

Catherine was at this time in the midst of the delightful hurry of preparing her wedding clothes, and well knowing how anxious Mrs. Danvers was to obtain work, she had set aside a good deal for her. A portion of this Mrs. Danvers had been tempted to entrust to these poor destitute young women, and seeing them evidently too miserably without resource to offer anything in the shape of a deposit, she had left the work without exacting one. Hence her very natural uneasiness when the promised things did not appear to the time.

And hence the rather grave looks of Reynolds, when the excuses were mentioned to him, for he could not endure to see his mistress vexed.

“Has the workwoman brought her bill with her, Reynolds?” asked Mrs. Danvers, after Catherine had examined the needlework, which was remarkably well and neatly done.

“I will go and ask.”

“Stay, you had better tell her to come up ; I should like to inquire how she is going on, and whether she has any other work in prospect.”

Reynolds immediately obeyed, and going down stairs, soon returned with Lettice. The door was opened and she presented herself, poor thing, looking a good deal ashamed of her own appearance in this nice and comfortable breakfast-room, where though, as you will suppose after what I have said, there was no appearance of superfluous luxury, everything looked elegant and refined. A pretty breakfast was set out upon the table, and a bright fire blazing up delightfully in the grate.

Lettice stood still, looking for a moment at these things, rather dazzled, and rather confused, by the contrast with the scene out of doors during her cold blowing walk, in the sleet and wind. She stood there looking starved and timid.

“Good morning, my dear,” said Mrs. Dan-

vers, kindly ; “ I am sorry you have had such a wretched walk this morning ; but,” she added, “ why did you not come last night ? Punctuality, my dear, is the soul of business, and if you desire to form a private connexion for yourself, you will find it of the utmost importance to attend to it. This young lady is just going off, and there is barely time to put up the things.”

Catherine had her back turned to the door, and was quietly continuing her breakfast, whilst this was going on. She did not even look round as Mrs. Danvers spoke, but when a gentle voice replied,—

“ Indeed, madam, I beg your pardon. Indeed, I did my very best, but ——”

She started, looked up, and rose hastily from her chair. Lettice, as she did so, started too, on her side.

She turned pale, then red again, and advancing a few steps, exclaimed—

“ Catherine !”

“It must—it is—it is you! cried Catherine hastily coming forward, and taking her by the hand—gazing, as she did so, with a sort of piteous astonishment, at the worn and weather-beaten face, the miserable attire, the picture of utter wretchedness before her. “You!” she kept repeating—“Lettice!—Lettice Arnold! Good Heavens! where are they all? Where is your father? Your mother? Your sister?”

“Gone!” said the poor girl. “Gone—every one gone but poor Myra!”

“And she—where is *she*? The beautiful creature, that used to be the pride of poor Mrs. Price’s heart. How lovely she was! And you—dear, dear Lettice, how can you—how have you come to this?”

Mrs. Danvers stood like one petrified with astonishment whilst this little scene was going on. She kept looking at the two girls, but said nothing.

“Poor dear Lettice!” Catherine went on in

a tone of the most affectionate kindness, "have you come all through the streets alone this most miserable morning? And working—working for me! Good heavens! how has all this come about?"

"But come to the fire first," she continued, taking hold of the almost frozen hand; "come and warm yourself first. How cold you are! Gracious me! How can it all have happened?"

"You seem to have met with an old acquaintance, Catherine. Pray take this chair, and come and sit down by the fire and warm yourself; the morning is excessively cold, and perhaps you have not breakfasted."

Lettice hesitated.

She felt as if there would be something of presumption in accepting the invitation. She had become so accustomed to her fallen condition, that it seemed to her that she could no longer with propriety sit down to the same table with Catherine.

Catherine perceived this, and it shocked and grieved her excessively. "Do come and sit down," she said, encouraged by Mrs. Danvers' invitation, "and tell us have you breakfasted? But even if you have, a warm cup of tea this cold morning can do you no harm."

And she pressed her kindly forward, and seated her, half reluctant, in an arm-chair that stood by the fire: then she poured out a cup of tea, and carried it to her, repeating,—

"Won't you eat? Have you breakfasted?"

The plate of bread-and-butter looked delicious to the half-starved girl;—the warm cup of tea seemed to bring new life into her. She had continued silent from surprise, and a sort of sense of humiliated embarrassment; but now her spirits began to revive under these kindly influences, and she said, "I never expected to have seen you again, Miss Melwyn!"

"*Miss Melwyn!* What does that mean?—Dear Lettice, don't call me that—but how has all this come about?"

“My father was ill the last time you were in Nottinghamshire, if you recollect, Miss Melwyn? Of that illness he never recovered; but it lasted for nearly two years. It was whilst we were nursing him through it that your aunt, Mrs. Montague, died; and her house was sold, and new people came and lived there; so that you never came to Castle Rising afterwards.”

“No—indeed—and from that day to this have never chanced to hear anything of its inhabitants. But Mrs. Price—your aunt—who was so fond of Myra—what is become of her?”

“She died before my poor father.”

“Well; but she was rich. Did she do nothing?”

“Everybody thought her rich, because she spent a good deal of money; but she had very little property—it was chiefly from an annuity that she got her income. Our poor aunt was no great economist—she made no savings.”

“Well ; and your mother ?—I cannot understand it. No ; I cannot understand it,” Catherine kept repeating. “So horrible !—dear, dear Lettice—and your shawl is quite wet, and so is your bonnet, poor dear girl. Why did you not put up your umbrella ?”

“For a very good reason, dear Miss Melwyn ; because I do not possess one.”

“Call me Catherine, won’t you ?—or I will not speak to you again.”

But it now seemed time to reply to Mrs. Danvers’ inquiring looks, which appeared to demand a little attention. She was completely puzzled and equally interested by the scene, and she looked impatiently for some explanation of the enigma. Catherine caught her eye, and turning from her friend, with whom she had been so much absorbed as for the moment apparently to forget everything else, she went up to her and said,

“Lettice Arnold is a clergyman’s daughter, ma’am.”

"I began to think something of that sort," said Mrs. Danvers ; "but, my dear young lady, what can have brought you to this terrible state of destitution?"

"Misfortune upon misfortune, madam. My father was, indeed, a clergyman, and held the little vicarage of Castle Rising. There Catherine," looking affectionately up at her, "met me upon her visits to her aunt, Mrs. Montague."

"We have known each other from children," put in Catherine.

At that moment the door opened and Reynolds appeared—

"The cab is waiting, if you please, Miss Melwyn."

"Oh, dear! oh dear! dear Mrs. Danvers, what's to be done?—I can't go just this moment; it's impossible. Pray bid the man wait."

"It is late already," said Reynolds, taking out his watch. "The train starts in twenty minutes."

“Oh, dear ! oh, dear !—and when does the next go ?—I can’t go by this. Can I, dear Mrs. Danvers ? It is impossible.”

“There is another train will start in about an hour from this time, Miss Melwyn,” said Reynolds.

“Oh ! that will do—pray tell Sarah to be ready for that. Well, my dear, go on—go on, dear Lettice, you were about to tell us how all this had happened,—but just another cup of tea first ; do you like it strong ?”

“I like it any way,” said Lettice, who was beginning a little to recover her spirits,—“I have not tasted anything so comfortable for a very long time.”

“Dear me !—dear me !”

“You must have suffered very much, I fear, my dear young lady,” said Mrs. Danvers, in a kind voice of interest, “before you could have sunk to the level of that miserable home where I found you.”

“Yes,” said Lettice.—“Every one suffers very much, be the descent slow or rapid, when

he has to fall so far. But what were my sufferings to poor Myra's!"

"And why were your sufferings as nothing in comparison to poor Myra's?"

"Ah, madam, there are some in this world not particularly favoured by nature or fortune, who seem as if they were born to be denied; who have been used to it from their childhood—it becomes a sort of second nature to them, as it were. They scarcely feel it. But a beautiful girl, adored by an old relation, accustomed to every sort of indulgence and luxury!—For they doted upon the very ground she trod on.—Oh! to be cast down to such misery—that is dreadful."

"I don't see—I don't know," said Catherine, who, like the world in general, however much they might admire, and however much too many might flatter Myra, greatly preferred Lettice to her sister.

"I don't know how that may exactly be," said she, doubtingly.

"Ah! but you would know if you could

see!" said the generous girl. "If you could know what she suffers from everything—from things that I do not even feel, far less care for—you would be so sorry for her."

Mrs. Danvers looked with increasing interest upon the speaker. She seemed to wish to go on with the conversation about this sister so much pitied; so she said, "I believe what you say is very true. Very true, Catherine, in spite of your sceptical looks. Some people really do suffer very much more than others under the same circumstances of privation."

"Yes, selfish people like Myra," thought Catherine, but she said nothing.

"Indeed, madam," said Lettice, "what you say is so true. Some seem to feel everything so much more. Poor Myra—I can sleep like a top in our bed, when she very often cannot close her eyes; and it is the same with other things—the close room, and the poor food. I can get along—I was made to rough it, as my poor aunt always said—but Myra!"

“Well but,” rejoined Catherine, “do pray tell us how you came to this cruel pass? Your poor father——”

“His illness was very lingering and very painful—and several times a surgical operation was required. My mother could not bear—could any of us?—to have it done by the poor blundering operator of that remote village. To have a surgeon from Nottingham was very expensive; and then the medicines; and the necessary food and attendance! The kindest and most provident father cannot save much out of one hundred and ten pounds a-year, and what had been saved was soon all gone.”

“Well, well,” repeated Catherine, her eyes fixed with intense interest upon the speaker.

“His death-bed was a painful scene,” Lettice went on, her face working with emotion, whilst she with great effort restrained her tears: “he trusted in God; but there was a fearful prospect before us, and he could not help trembling for his children.—Dear, dear

father ! he reproached himself for his want of faith, and would try to strengthen us, ‘but the flesh,’ he said, ‘was weak.’ He could not look forward without anguish. It was a fearful struggle to be composed and confiding—he could not help being anxious.—It was for us, you know, not for himself.”

“Frightful !” cried Catherine, indignantly ; “frightful ! that a man of education, a scholar, a gentleman, a man of so much activity in doing good, and so much power in preaching it, should be brought to this. One hundred and ten pounds a-year, was that all ? How could you exist ?”

“We had the house and the garden besides, you know, and my mother did her best ; and my father ! No member of the severest religious order was ever more self-denying. There was only me. My aunt Price, you know, took Myra—Myra has been delicate from a child, and was so beautiful—and she was never made to rough it, my mother and my aunt said.

Now I seemed made expressly for the purpose," she added, smiling with perfect simplicity.

"And his illness, so long! and so expensive!" exclaimed Catherine, with a sort of cry.

"Yes, it was—and to see the pains he took that it should not be expensive. He would be quite annoyed if my mother got anything nicer than usual for his dinner. She used to be obliged to make a mystery of it; and we were forced almost to go down upon our knees to get him to have the surgeon from Nottingham. Nothing but the idea that his life would be more secure in such hands could have persuaded him into it. He knew how important that was to us. As for the pain which the bungling old doctor hard by would have given him, he would have borne that rather than have spent money. Oh, Catherine! there have been times upon times when I have envied what are called the Poor. They have hospitals to go to; they are not ashamed to ask for a little wine

from those who have it; they can beg when they are in want of a morsel of bread. It is natural. It is right—they feel it to be right. But oh! for those, as they say, better born—and educated to habits of thought like those of my poor father! Want is, indeed, like an armed man, when he comes into *their* dwellings.”

“Too true, my dear young lady,” said Mrs. Danvers, whose eyes were by this time moist; “but go on, if it does not pain you too much, your story is excessively interesting. There is yet a wide step between where your relation leaves us, and where I found you.”

“We closed his eyes at last in deep sorrow. Excellent man, he deserved a better lot! So, at least, it seems to me—but who knows? Nay, he would have reproved me for saying so. He used to say of *himself*, so cheerfully, ‘It’s a rough road, but it leads to a good place.’ Why could he not feel this for his wife and children? He found that so very difficult!”

“He was an excellent and a delightful man,” said Catherine. “Well?” . . .

“Well, my dear, when he had closed his eyes, there was his funeral. We *could* not bear to have a parish funeral. The veriest pauper has a piety towards the dead which revolts at that. We did it as simply as we possibly could, consistently with common decency; but they charge so enormously for such things: and my poor mother would not contest it. When I remonstrated a little, and said I thought it was right to prevent others being treated in the same way, who could no better afford it than we could, I shall never forget my mother’s face: ‘I dare say—you are right, Lettice,—quite right—but not this—not *his*. I cannot debate that matter. Forgive me, dear girl; it is weak, but I cannot.’

“This expense exhausted all that was left of our little money: only a few pounds remained when our furniture had been sold,

we were obliged to give up possession of that dear, dear, little parsonage, and we were without a roof to shelter us. You remember the parsonage, Catherine !”

“Remember it! to be sure I do. That sweet little place. The tiny house, all covered over with honeysuckles and jasmines. How sweet they *did* smell. And your flower-garden, Lettice, how you used to work in it. It was that which made you so hale and strong, aunt Montague said. She admired your industry so, you can’t think. She used to say you were worth a whole bundle of fine ladies.”

“Did she ?” and Lettice smiled again. She was beginning to look cheerful, in spite of her dismal story. There was something so inveterately cheerful in that temper, that nothing could entirely subdue it. The warmth of her generous nature it was that kept the blood and spirits flowing.

“It was a sad day when we parted from it.

My poor mother! How she kept looking back—looking back—striving not to cry—and Myra was drowned in tears.”

“And what did you do?”

“I am sure I don’t know,—I was so sorry for them both,—I quite forget all the rest.”

“But how came you to London?” asked Mrs. Danvers. “Everybody, without other resource, seems to come to London. The worst place, especially for women, they can possibly choose. People are so completely lost in London. Nobody dies of want, nobody is utterly and entirely destitute of help or friends, except in London.”

“A person we knew in the village, and to whom my father had been very kind, had a son who was employed in one of the great linen warehouses,—and he promised to endeavour to get us needlework; and we flattered ourselves, with industry, we should, all three together, do pretty well. So we came to London, and took a small lodging, and

furnished it with the remnant of our furniture. We had our clothes, which, though plain enough, were a sort of little property you know. But when we came to learn the prices they actually paid for work, it was really frightful! Work fourteen hours a-day a-piece, and we could only gain between three and four shillings a-week each,—sometimes hardly that. There was our lodging to pay, three shillings a-week, and six shillings left for firing and food for three people; this was in the weeks of *plenty*. Oh! it was frightful!”

“Horrible!” echoed Catherine.

“We could not bring ourselves down to it at once. We hoped and flattered ourselves that by-and-by we should get some work that would pay better; and when we wanted a little more food, or in very cold days a little more fire, we were tempted to sell or pawn one article after another. At last my mother fell sick, and then all went,—she died,—and

she *had* a pauper's funeral," continued Lettice, turning very pale.

They were all three silent. At last Mrs. Danvers began again.

"Was that the lodging I found you in?"

"No, madam, the first we took proved too expensive. We were obliged to leave it, and we only pay one-and-sixpence a-week for this, the furniture being our own."

"The cab is at the door, Miss Melwyn," again interrupted Reynolds.

"Oh dear! Oh dear! I can't go—indeed, Mrs. Danvers, I can't go;" with a pleading look, "may I stay one day longer?"

"Most gladly would I keep you, my dearest love, but your father and mother.— And they will have sent to meet you."

"And suppose they have, John can go back; but stay, stay,—Sarah shall go and take all my boxes, and say I am coming to-morrow,—that will do."

"And you travel alone by railway? Your

mother will never approve of such a plan."

"I am ashamed," cried Catherine, with energy, "to think of such mere conventional difficulties, when here I stand in the presence of real misery. Indeed, my dear Mrs. Danvers, my mother will be quite satisfied when she hears why I staid. I must be a hard-hearted creature indeed, if I could go away without seeing more of dear Lettice."

Lettice looked up so pleased, so grateful, so happy.

"Well, my love, I think your mother will not be uneasy, as Sarah goes; and I just remember Mrs. Sands travels your way to-morrow, so she will take care of you,—for taken care of you must be, my pretty Catherine, till you are a little less young, and somewhat less handsome than you are now."

And she patted the sweet, full, rosy cheek.

Catherine was very pretty indeed, if you care to know that. And so this matter was settled.

And now Lettice, having enjoyed a happier hour than she had known for many a long day, began to recollect herself, and to think of poor Myra.

She rose from her chair, and taking up her bonnet and shawl, which Catherine had hung before the fire to dry, seemed preparing to depart.

Then both Catherine and Mrs. Danvers began to think of her little bill, which had not been settled yet. Catherine felt excessively awkward and uncomfortable at the idea of offering her old friend and companion money; but Mrs. Danvers was too well acquainted with real misery,—had too much approbation for that spirit which is not above *earning*, but is above begging,—to have any embarrassment in such a case.

“Catherine, my dear,” she said, “you owe Miss Arnold some money. Had you not better settle it before she leaves?”

Both the girls blushed.

“Nay, my dears,” said Mrs. Danvers, kindly; “why this?—I am sure,” coming up to them, and taking Lettice’s hand, “I hold an honest hand here, which is not ashamed to labour, when it has been the will of God that it shall be by her own exertions that she obtains her bread,—and part of the bread of another, if I mistake not. What you have nobly earned as nobly receive. Humiliation belongs to the idle and the dependent,—not to one who maintains herself.”

The eyes of Lettice glistened, and she could not help gently pressing the hand which held hers.

Such sentiments were congenial to her heart. She had never been able to comprehend those conventional distinctions between what is to be considered honourable or degrading, under the influence of which so many lose the higher principles of independence—true honesty and true honour. To work for her living had never lessened her in her own

eyes; and she had found, with a sort of astonishment, that it was to sink her in the eyes of others. 'To deny herself everything, in food, furniture, clothing, in order to escape debt, and add in her little way to the comforts of those she loved, had ever appeared to her noble and praiseworthy. She was as astonished, as many such a heart as hers has been before, when she learned by experience, the standard by which the world in general seems pleased to measure its respect and consideration. That standard too generally being what people think proper to spend upon themselves, rather than what they find themselves inclined to spare for others. Do what I will, you see, I cannot get that story in the newspaper out of my head. Or the contempt implied or expressed by all parties concerned,—newspaper editor himself, if I mistake not, included,—for the woman who was content to dine upon one mutton chop, potatoes, and a few greens.

Catherine's confusion had, in a moment of weakness, extended to Lettice. She had felt ashamed to be paid as a workwoman by one once her friend, and in social rank her equal; but now she raised her head with a noble frankness and spirit.

"I am very much obliged to you for recollecting the account, madam, for in truth the money is very much wanted; and if," turning to her old friend, "my dear Catherine can find me a little more work, I should be very greatly obliged to her."

Catherine again changed colour. Work! she was longing to offer her money. She had twenty pounds in her pocket, a present from her god-mother, to buy something pretty for her wedding. She was burning with the desire to put it into Lettice's hand.

She stammered—she hesitated.

"Perhaps you *have* no more work just now," said Lettice. "Never mind, then; I am sure when there is an opportunity, you

will remember what a pleasure it will be to me to work for you—and that a poor needle-woman is very much benefited by having private customers.”

“My dear, dear Lettice!” and Catherine’s arms were round her neck. She could not help shedding a few tears.

“But to return to business,” said Mrs. Danvers, “for I see Miss Arnold is impatient to be gone. What is your charge, my dear? These slips are tucked and beautifully stitched and done.”

“I should not get more than threepence, at most fourpence, at the shops for them. Should you think ninepence an unreasonable charge? I believe it is what you would pay if you had them done at the schools.”

“Threepence! fourpence! ninepence! Good heavens!” cried Catherine; “so beautifully done as these are—and then your needles and thread, you have made no charge for them.”

“We pay for those ourselves,” said Lettice.

“But, my dear,” said Mrs. Danvers, “what Catherine would have to pay for this work, if bought from a linen warehouse, would at least be fifteen pence, and not nearly so well done,—for these are beautiful. Come, you must ask eighteen-pence—there are six of them—nine shillings, my dear.”

The eyes of poor Lettice quite glistened. She could not refuse. She felt that to seem over delicate about this little enhancement of price on the part of one who wished her well, would be really a mere exhibition of great moral indelicacy and unseasonable pride. “Thank you,” said she, “you are very liberal; but it must only be for this once. If I am to be your needlewoman in ordinary, Catherine, I must only be paid what you would pay to others.”

She smiled pleasantly as she said this; but Catherine could not answer the smile. She felt very sad as she drew the nine shillings from her purse,—longing to make them nine

sovereigns. But she laid the money at last before Lettice, upon the table.

Lettice took it up, and bringing out an old dirty leathern purse, was going to put it in.

“At least, let me give you a better purse,” said Catherine, eagerly, offering her own handsome one,—it was of a strong texture, for it was her business purse.

“They would think I had stolen it,” said Lettice, putting it aside. “No, thank you, dear, kind Catherine. Consistency in all things; and my old leather convenience seems to me much more consistent with my bonnet than your beautiful one. Not but that I shall get myself a decent bonnet *now*, for really this is a shame to be seen. And so, good-bye; and farewell, madam. When you *have* work, you won’t forget me, will you, dear?”

“Oh, Catherine has plenty of work to be done,” put in Mrs. Danvers, “but somehow she is not quite herself this morning,” again looking at her very kindly. “You cannot

wonder, Miss Arnold, that she is much more agitated by this meeting than you can be. My dear, there are those pocket-handkerchiefs to be marked, which we durst not trust to an unknown person. That will be a profitable job. You would have to pay five shillings a-piece at Mr. Morris's for having them embroidered according to that pattern you fixed upon, and which I doubt not your friend and her sister can execute. There are six of them to be marked, you know."

"May I look at the pattern?—Oh yes! I think I can do it. I will take the greatest possible pains. Six at five shillings each. Oh, madam!—Oh, Catherine!—what a benefit this will be."

Again Catherine felt it impossible to speak. She could only stoop down, take the poor hand, so roughened with hardships, and raise it to her lips.

The beautiful handkerchiefs were brought.

"I will only take one at a time, if you

please. These are too valuable to be risked at our lodgings. When I have done this I will fetch another, and so on. I shall not lose time in getting them out of hand, depend upon it," said Lettice, cheerfully.

"Take two, at all events, and then Myra can help you."

"No, only one at present at least, thank you."

She did not say what she knew to be very true, that Myra could not help her. Myra's fingers were twice as delicate as her own—and Myra, before their misfortunes, had mostly spent her time in ornamental work—her aunt holding plain sewing to be an occupation rather beneath so beautiful and distinguished a creature. Nevertheless, when work became of so much importance to them all, as the only means of subsistence ; and the power of executing fine work well more especially so, as the way of turning time to a better account—and adding to the pittance which, labour as

they would, it was impossible by mere plain sewing, to increase—it was found that Myra's pretended accomplishments in this way were utterly useless.

To excel in anything, be it needlework or be it anything else, requires a something more strenuous than the listless half attention she was accustomed to pay. Spoiled and indulged as she had been, by a silly good-natured relation, she had never been called upon to exercise that strenuous and persevering, and—to the self-indulgent, and indolent, painful industry—which is necessary to do anything *well*. Self-denial, self-government, virtuous resistance against weariness, disgust, aching fingers and heavy eyes—temptations which haunt the indefatigable labourer in such callings, she was utterly incapable of: the consequence was, that she worked in a very inferior manner. Whilst Lettice, as soon as she became aware of the importance of this accomplishment, and the

means it would afford of increasing her power of adding to her mother's comforts, had been indefatigable in her endeavours to accomplish herself in the art, and was become a very excellent workwoman.

CHAPTER III.

Umbriel, a dusky, melancholy sprite,
As ever sullied the fair face of light.

POPE.

AND now she is upon her way home. And oh! how lightly beats that honest, simple heart in her bosom: and oh! how cheerily sits her spirit upon its throne. How happily, too, she looks about at the shops,—and thinks of what she shall buy. Not of what she can possibly do without; not of the very cheapest and poorest that is to be had for money, but upon what she shall *choose*!

'Then she remembers the fable of the Maid and the Milk-pail, and grows prudent and prosaic, and resolves that she will not spend her money till she has got it. She begins to limit her desires, and to determine that she will only lay out six shillings this morning, and keep three in her purse, as a resource against contingencies. Nay, she begins to grow a little Martha-like and careful, and to dream about savings-banks; and putting half-a-crown in, out of the way of temptation, when she is paid for her first pocket-handkerchief.

Six shillings, however, she means to expend for the more urgent wants. Two shillings coals; one shilling a very, very coarse straw bonnet; four pence ribbon to trim it with; one shilling bread, and six pence potatoes; a half-penny worth of milk; and then, what will be left?—One shilling and a penny half-penny. Myra shall have a cup of tea—with sugar in it; and a muffin, that she loves so, and a bit of butter. Four pennyworth of tea,

three pennyworth of sugar, two pennyworth of butter, one penny muffin,—and three pence halfpenny remains in the good little manager's hands.

She came up the dark stairs of her lodgings so cheerfully! followed by a boy lugging up her coals, she carrying the other purchases herself,—so happy!—quite radiant with joy,—and opened the door of the miserable little apartment.

It was a bleak wintry morning. Not a single ray of the sun could penetrate the grey fleecy covering in which the houses were wrapped; yet the warmth of the smoke and fires was sufficient so far to assist the temperature of the atmosphere as to melt the dirty snow, which now kept dripping from the roofs in dreary cadence, and splashing upon the pavement below.

The room looked so dark, so dreary, so dismal! Such a contrast to the one she had just left!

Myra was up, and was dressed in her miserable, half-worn, cotton gown, which was thrown round her in the most untidy, comfortless manner. She could not think it worth while to care how *such* a gown was put on. Her hair was dingy and disordered; to be sure there was but a broken comb to straighten it with,—and who could do anything with *such* a comb? She was cowering over the fire, which was now nearly extinguished, and from time to time, picking up the cinders bit by bit, as they fell upon the little hearth,—putting them on again,—endeavouring to keep the fire alive. Wretchedness in the extreme was visible in her dress, her attitude, her aspect.

She turned round as Lettice entered, and saying pettishly,—“I thought you never *would* come back,—and I do so want my shawl,”—returned to her former attitude, with her elbows resting upon her knees, and her chin upon the palms of her hands.

“I have been a sad long time, indeed,” said

Lettice, good-humouredly; “you must have been tired to death of waiting for me,—and wondering what I *could* be about. But I’ve brought something back which will make you amends. And, in the first place, here’s your shawl,” putting it over her,—“and thank you for the use of it—though I would not ask your leave, because I could not bear to waken you. But I was *sure* you would lend it me—and now for the fire. For once in a way we *will* have a good one. There, Sim, bring in the coals,—put them in that wooden box there. Now for a good lump or two.” And on the lumps accordingly went; and the expiring fire began to crackle and sparkle, and make a pleasant noise,—and a blaze soon caused even that room to look a little cheerful.

“Oh dear! I am so glad we may for *once* be allowed to have coal enough to put a spark of life into us,” said Myra.

Lettice had by this time filled the little old tin kettle, and was putting it upon the fire,—

and then she fetched an old tea-pot with a broken spout,—a saucer without a cup,—and a cup without a saucer; and putting the two together,—for they were usually divided between the sisters, said:—

“I have got something for you which I know you will like still better than a blaze,—a cup of tea. And to warm your poor fingers, see if you can’t toast yourself this muffin,”—handing it to her upon what was now a two-pronged, but had once been a three-pronged, fork.

“But what have you got for yourself?” Myra had at least the grace to say.

“Oh! I have had *such* a breakfast. And such a thing has happened! But I cannot and will not tell you till you have had your own breakfast, poor dear girl. You must be ravenous—at least, I should be in your place—but you never seem so hungry as I am, poor Myra. However, I was sure you could eat a muffin.”

“That was very good natured of you, Lettice, to think of it. It *will* be a treat. But oh! to think that we should be brought to this—to think a muffin—*one* muffin—a treat!” she added, dismally.

“Let us be thankful when we get it, however,” said her sister. “Upon my word, Mrs. Bull has given us some very good coals. Oh, how the kettle does enjoy them! It must be quite a treat to our kettle to feel *hot*—poor thing! Lukewarm is the best it mostly attains to. Hear how it buzzes and hums, like a pleased child.”

And so she prattled, and put a couple of spoonfuls of tea into the cracked tea-pot. There were but about six in the paper, but Myra liked her tea strong, and she should have it as she pleased this once. Then she poured out a cup, put in some milk and sugar, and, with a smile of ineffable affection, presented it with the muffin she had buttered, to her sister. Myra *did* enjoy it. To the poor, weedy,

delicate thing, a cup of good tea with something to eat that she could relish, *was* a real blessing. Mrs. Danvers was right so far: things did really go much harder with her than they did with Lettice; but then she made them six times worse by her discontented and murmuring spirit; and Lettice made them six times better by her cheerfulness and generous disregard of self.

Whilst the one sister was enjoying her breakfast, the other, who really began to feel tired, was very glad to sit down and enjoy the fire. So she took the other chair, and putting herself upon the opposite side of the little table, began to stretch out her feet to the fender, and feel herself quite comfortable. Three shillings in her purse, and three pence halfpenny to do just what she liked with!—perhaps buy Myra a roll for tea: there would be butter enough left.

Then she began her story. But the effect it produced was not exactly what she had

expected. Instead of sharing in her sister's thankful joy for this unexpected deliverance from the most abject want, through the discovery of a friend—able and willing to furnish employment herself, and to recommend them, as, in her hopeful view of things, Lettice anticipated, to others, and promising them work of a description that would pay well, and make them quite comfortable—Myra began to draw a repining contrast between Catherine's situation and her own.

The poor beauty had been educated by her silly and romantic old aunt to look forward to making some capital match. "She had such a sweet pretty face, and so many accomplishments of mind and manner,"—for such was the way the old woman loved to talk. Accomplishments of mind and manner, by the way, are indefinite things; anybody may put in a claim for them on the part of any one. As for the more positive acquirements which are to be seen, handled, or heard, to be appreciated

—such as dancing, music, languages, and so forth, Myra had as slender a portion of those as usually falls to the lot of indulged, idle, nervous girls. The poor beauty felt all the bitterness of the deepest mortification at what she considered this cruel contrast of her fate as compared to Catherine's. She had been indulged in that pernicious habit of the mind—the making claims. “With claims no better than her own,” was her expression. For though Catherine had more money than she had, everybody said Catherine was *only* pretty—which last sentence implied that there was another person of Catherine's acquaintance, who was positively and extremely beautiful.

Lettice, happily for herself, had never been accustomed to make “claims.” She had, indeed, never distinctly understood whom such claims were to be made upon. She could not quite see why it was very *hard* that other people should be happier than herself. I am sure she would have been very sorry if she

had thought that everybody was as uncomfortable.

She was always sorry when she heard her sister talking in this manner, partly because she felt it could not be quite right, and partly because she was sure it did no good, but made matters a great deal worse; but she said nothing. Exhortation, indeed, most assuredly only made matters worse. Nothing offended Myra so much as an attempt to make her believe herself rather more comfortable, or to reconcile her to the fate she complained of as so *hard*.

Even when let alone, it would often be some time before she recovered her good humour when she heard of any one better off than herself; and this proved the case now. I am afraid she was a little vexed that Lettice and not herself had met with the good luck first to stumble upon Catherine; and also a little envious of the pleasing impression it was plain her sister had made. So she began to fall

foul of Lettice's new bonnet, and to say in a captious tone,

"You got money enough to buy yourself a new bonnet, I see."

"Indeed, I did," Lettice answered, with simplicity. "It was the very first thing I thought of. Mine was such a wretched thing, and wetted with the snow; the very boys hooted at it. Poor old friend!" said she, turning it upon her hand, "you have lost even the shape and pretension to be a bonnet. What must I do with thee? The back of the fire? Sad fate! No, generous companion of my cares and labours, that shall *not* be thy destiny. Useful to the last, thou shalt *light* to-morrow's fire, and that will be the best satisfaction to thy generous manes."

"*My* bonnet is not so *very* much better," said Myra, rather sulkily.

"*Not* so *very* much, alas! but still better, far better than mine. And, besides, confess, please, my dear, that you had the last bonnet.

Two years ago, it's true ; but mine had seen three ; and then, remember, I am going into grand company again to-morrow, and *must* be decent."

This last remark did not sweeten Myra's temper.

"Oh! I forgot. Of course you'll keep your good company to yourself. I am, indeed, not fit to be seen in it. But you'll want a new gown and a new shawl, my dear ; though, indeed, you can always take mine, as you did this morning."

"Now, Myra!" said Lettice, "can you really be so naughty? Nay, you are cross ; I see it in your face, though you won't look at me. Now don't be so foolish. Is it not all the same to us both? Are we not in one box? If you wish for the new bonnet, take it, and I'll take yours ; I don't care, my dear. You were always used to be more handsomely dressed than me—it must seem quite odd for you not to be so. I only want to be decent

when I go about the work, which I shall have to do often, as I told you, because I dare not have two of these expensive handkerchiefs in my possession at once. Dear me, girl ! Have we not troubles enough ? For goodness' sake don't let us *make* them. There, dear, take the bonnet, and I'll take yours ; but I declare when I look at the two, this is so horridly coarse,—yours, old as it is, looks the genteeler to my mind," laughing.

So thought Myra, and kept her own bonnet : Lettice putting upon it the piece of new ribbon she had bought, and after smoothing and rubbing the faded one upon her sister's, trimming with it her own.

The two friends in Green Street sat silently for a short time after the door had closed upon Lettice, and then Catherine began.

“More astonishing things happen in the real world than one ever finds in a book. I am sure if such a reverse of fortune as this had been described to me in a story, I should at once have declared it to be impossible. I could not have believed it credible that, in a society such as ours—full of all sorts of kind, good-natured people, who are daily doing so much for the poor—an amiable girl like this, the daughter of a clergyman of the Church of England, could be suffered to sink into such abject poverty.”

“Ah! my dear Catherine, that shows you have only seen life upon one side, and that its fairest side—as it presents itself in the country. You cannot imagine what a dreadful thing it may prove in large cities. It cannot enter into the head of man to conceive the horrible contrasts to be met with in large cities—the dreadful destitution of large cities—the awful solitude of a crowd. In the country, I think, such a thing as this hardly could have

happened,—however great the difficulty may be of helping those who still preserve the delicacy and dignity with regard to money matters, which distinguishes finer minds. But in London, what *can* be expected? Like lead in the mighty waters, the moneyless and friendless sink to the bottom. Society in all its countless degrees closes over them : they are lost in its immensity—hidden from every eye—and they perish as an insect might perish amid the myriads of its kind, unheeded by every other living creature. Ah, my love! if your walks lay where mine have done, your heart would bleed for these destitute women, born to better hopes, and utterly shipwrecked.”

“She was such a dear, amiable girl,” Catherine went on, “so cheerful, so sweet-tempered!—so clever in all that one likes to see people clever about! Her mother was a silly woman.”

“So she showed, I fear, by coming to London,” said Mrs. Danvers.

“She was so proud of Myra’s beauty; and

she seemed to think so little of Lettice. She was always prophesying that Myra would make a great match. As did her aunt, Mrs. Price, who was no wiser than Mrs. Arnold; and they brought up the poor girl to such a conceit of herself,—to ‘not to do this,’ and ‘it was beneath her to do that,’—and referring every individual thing to her comfort and advancement, till, poor girl, she could hardly escape growing, what she certainly did grow into, a very spoiled, selfish creature. While dear Lettice in her simplicity,—that simplicity ‘which thinketh no evil,’—took it so naturally, that so it was, and so it ought to be; that sometimes one laughed, and sometimes one felt provoked—but one loved her above all things.—I never saw such a temper.”

“I dare say,” said Mrs. Danvers, “the true reason of your wish to stay in town to-day was the intention of paying them a visit at their own home, which, indeed, we had better do. I had only a glance into their apartment

the other day, but it occurred to me that they wanted common necessities. Ignorant as I was of who they were, I was thinking to get them put upon Lady A——'s coal and blanket list, but that cannot very well be done now. However, presents are always permitted under certain conditions, and the most delicate receive them ; and, really, this is a case, in some measure, to waive feelings of that sort. As you are an old friend and acquaintance, there can be no harm in a few presents before you leave town."

"So I was thinking, ma'am, and I am very impatient to go and see them, and find out what they may be most in want of."

"Well, my dear, I do not see why we should lose time; and I will order a cab to take us; for it is rather too far to walk this terrible day."

They soon arrived at the place I have described, and, descending from their cab, walked along in front of this row of lofty houses, looking upon the grave-yard, and inhabited by so

much human misery. The doors of most of the houses stood open, for they were all let in separate rooms, and the entrance and staircase were common as the street.

What forms of human misery and degradation presented themselves during one short walk which I once took there with a friend, employed upon a mission of mercy !

Disease in its most frightful form, panting to inhale a little fresh air. Squalid misery, the result of the gin-shop,—decent misery ready to starve.—Women shut up in one room with great, heartless, brutal, disobedient boys,—sickness resting untended upon its solitary bed. Wailing infants,—scolding mothers,—human nature under its most abject and degraded forms. No thrift, no economy, no attempt at cleanliness and order. Idleness, recklessness, dirt and wretchedness. It may be that the very atmosphere of towns ; it may be that these close, ill-ventilated rooms ; most certainly the poisonous gin-shop, engender a

relaxed state of nerves and muscles, which deprives people of the spirits even to attempt to make themselves a little decent. Then water is so dear, and dirt so pervading the very atmosphere. Poor things! they may probably struggle for a time, but they give it up at last; and acquiesce in, and become accustomed to it, and "*avec un malheur sourd dont l'on ne se rend pas compte*," gradually sink and sink into the lowest abyss of habitual degradation.

It is difficult to express the painful sensations which Catherine experienced when she entered the room of the two sisters. To her the dirty paper, the carpetless floor, the miserable bed, the worm-eaten and scanty furniture, the aspect of extreme poverty which pervaded everything, were so shocking, that she could hardly restrain her tears. Not so Mrs. Danvers.

Greater poverty even she, could rarely have seen, but too often accompanied with what grieved her far more than any mere physical

privation could have done,—reckless indifference, and moral degradation. Dirt and disorder, those agents of the powers of darkness, were almost sure to be found where there was extreme want ; but here the case was, in this respect, different. As her experienced eye glanced round the room, she could perceive that—poor as was that best—the best *was* made of it ; that a cheerful, active spirit—the “How to make the best of it”—that spirit which is like the guardian angel of the poor, had been busy here.

The floor, though bare, was clean ; the bed, though so mean, made and neatly arranged ; the grate was bright ; the chairs were dusted ; the poor little plenishing put in order. No dirty garments hanging about the room ; they were all carefully folded and put away : though she could not of course see that ; for there were no half-open drawers of the sloven, admitting dust and dirt, and offending the eye. Lettice, herself, with hair neatly braided, her poor

worn gown carefully put on, was sitting by the little table, busy at her work, looking the very picture of modest industry. There was only one object to offend the nice moral sense of Mrs. Danvers ; and that was the figure of Myra. She sat there with her fine hair hanging round her face in long, dirty, dishevelled ringlets, her feet stretched out and pushed slipshod into her shoes : her dress half put on, and hanging over her, as the maids say, “no how ;” leaning back in the chair and sewing very languidly, at a very dirty piece of work which she held in her hand.

Both sisters started up when the door opened. Lettice’s cheeks flushed with joy, and her eye sparkled with pleasure as she rose to receive her guests—brought forward her other only chair, stirred the fire, and sent the light of a pleasant blaze through the room. Myra coloured also, but her first action was to stoop down hastily to pull up the heels of her shoes ; she then cast a hurried glance upon her

dress, and arranged it a little,—occupied as usual with herself, her own appearance the first thought—and never in her life more disagreeably presented to her.

Catherine shook hands heartily with Lettice, saying, “We are soon met again, you see;” and then went up to Myra, and extended her hand to her also. The other took it, but was evidently so excessively ashamed of her poverty and her present appearance, before one who had seen her in better days, that she could not speak, or make any reply to a kind speech of Catherine’s, except by a few unintelligible murmurs.

“I was impatient to come,” said Catherine—she and Mrs. Danvers having seated themselves upon the two smaller chairs, whilst the sisters sat together upon the larger one—“because, you know, I must go out of town so very soon, and I wanted to call upon you, and have a little chat and talk of old times; and really—really——”

She hesitated. Dear, good thing, she was so dreadfully afraid of mortifying either of her two old friends in their present fallen state.

“And really—really,” added Mrs. Danvers, smiling, “out with it, my love—really—really, Lettice, to tell the truth, Catherine feels as I am sure you would feel if the cases were reversed. She cannot bear the thoughts of her own prosperity, and at the same time think of your misfortunes. So I told her I was quite sure you would not be hurt if she did for you, what I was certain you would have done in such a case for her ; and that you would let her make you a little more comfortable before she went away. The poor thing’s wedding-day will be quite spoiled, you know, by thinking about you, if you won’t, Lettice.”

Lettice stretched out her hand to Catherine by way of answer ; and received in return the most warm and affectionate squeeze. Myra was very glad to be made more comfortable, there was no doubt of that ; but half offended,

and determined to be as little obliged as possible. And then, Catherine was going to be married, too : how hard !—all kinds of good luck seemed to be heaped upon *her*, and she herself so unfortunate in every way.

How *hard* !

But nobody cared for her ungracious looks. Catherine knew her of old, and Mrs. Danvers understood the sort of thing she was in a minute. Her walk had lain too long amid the victims of false views and imperfect moral training, to be surprised at this instance of their effects. The person who surprised her was Lettice.

“ Well, then,” said Catherine, now quite relieved, and looking round the room, “ where shall we begin ? What will you have ? What do you want most ? I shall make you wedding presents, you see, instead of you making them to me. When your turn comes, you shall have your revenge.”

“ Well,” Lettice said, “ what must be must

be, and it's nonsense playing at being proud. I am very much obliged to you, indeed, Catherine, for thinking of us, at this time ; and if I must tell you what I should be excessively obliged to you for, it is a pair of blankets. Poor Myra can hardly sleep for the cold."

"It's not the cold ; it's the wretched, hard, lumpy bed," muttered Myra.

This hint sent Catherine to the bed-side.

"Oh dear ! oh dear !" cried she, piteously ; "poor dear things, how could you sleep at all ? Do they call this a bed ?—and such blankets ! Poor Myra !" her compassion quite overcoming her dislike : "no wonder—My goodness ! My goodness ! it's very shocking indeed."

And the good young thing could not help crying.

"Blankets, dear girls ! to be sure you shall ; and a mattress, and a feather-bed, and two pillows. How have you lived through it ? And you, poor Myra, who used to be made so much of. Poor girl ! I am so sorry for you."

And oh ! how her heart smote her for all she had said and thought to Myra's disadvantage. And oh ! how the generous eyes of Lettice beamed with pleasure as these compassionate words were addressed to her sister. Myra was softened and affected. She could almost forgive Catherine for being so fortunate.

"You are very kind, indeed, Catherine," she said.

Catherine, now quite at her ease, began to examine into their other wants ; and without asking many questions, merely by peeping about, and forming her own conclusions, was soon pretty well aware of what was of the most urgent necessity. She was now quite upon the fidget to be gone, that she might order and send in the things ; and ten of the twenty pounds given her for wedding lace was spent before she and Mrs. Danvers reached home, —that lady laughing, and lamenting over the wedding-gown, which would certainly not be

flounced with Honiton lace, as Catherine's good god-mother had intended, and looking so pleased, contented, and happy, that it did Catherine's heart good to see her.

CHAPTER IV.

The swain in barren deserts with surprise
Sees lilies spring and sudden verdure rise;
And starts amid the thirsty wilds to hear
New falls of water murm'ring in his ear.

POPE.

IN the evening, Mrs. Danvers seemed rather tired, and the two sat over the fire a long time without a single word being uttered; but, at last, when tea was finished, and they had both taken their work, Catherine, who had been in profound meditation all this time, began:—

“My dear, Mrs. Danvers, are you rested? I

have a great deal to talk to you about, if you will let me."

"I must be very much tired, indeed, Catherine, when I will not *let* you talk, and like to hear you too," was the kind reply.

Mrs. Danvers reposed very comfortably in her arm-chair, with her feet upon a footstool, before the cheerful, blazing fire; and now Catherine drew her chair closer, rested her feet upon the fender too, and seemed to prepare herself for a regular confidential conversation with her beloved old friend.

"My dear Mrs. Danvers," she began, "you are such a friend both of my dear mother's and mine, that I think I may without scruple open my whole heart to you upon a matter in which more than myself are concerned. If you think me wrong, stop me," said she, laying her hand affectionately upon that of her friend, and fixing those honest, earnest eyes of hers upon her face.

Mrs. Danvers pressed the hand, and said:—

“My love, whatever you confide to me, you know is sacred; and if I can be of any assistance to you, dear girl, I think you need not scruple opening your mind—for you know I am a sort of general mother-confessor to all my acquaintance, and am as secret as such a profession demands.”

Catherine lifted up the hand; she held it, pressed it, and continued to hold it; then she looked at the fire a little while, and at last spoke.

“Did you never in your walk in life observe one evil under the sun, which appears to me to be a most crying one in many families,—the undue influence exercised by, and the power allowed to, servants?”

“Yes, my dear, there are few of the minor evils,—if minor it can be called,—that I have thought productive of more daily discomforts than that. At times, indeed, such evils assume a form of very great magnitude, and are serious and lamentable indeed. Alienated

hearts—divided families—and property to large amounts diverted from its just and legitimate channels. These I have seen the result of the base insinuations and selfish cunning of servants, acting upon minds naturally weak, or enfeebled by sickness or old age.—And, almost worse than all, a tyranny exercised and misery not to be told the result of it—over old age and a dying bed.”

Catherine slightly shuddered and said,—

“I have not had an opportunity of seeing much of the world, you know—what you describe to me is rather what I feared it might become, than what I have actually observed in some cases—but I have had a sort of presentiment of what might in future arise.—It is inexplicable to me the power a servant may gain, and the tyrannical way in which she will dare to exercise it.—The unaccountable way in which those who have every title to command, may be brought to obey, is scarcely to be believed, and to me almost a mystery.”

“Cowardice and indolence, my dear, will go far to explain that mystery. Enfeebled spirits—a weak body and a mind wanting resolution upon the one side—and upon the other a very inconvenient amount of moral force, arising from the very want of all those qualities which render moral force desirable. As want of delicacy, want of tenderness, want of honest principle, and so forth—want, above all, of enlarged understanding, and a right view of things. It is quite strange, and lamentable as strange, to observe the sort of rude, rough strength, which rough habits and coarse perceptions in such cases confer. Believe me, dear girl, almost as much power is obtained in this foolish world by the absence of certain qualities as by the possession of others.—Silly people are apt to think it so nice and easy to govern, and so difficult to obey. It requires, believe me, many higher qualities, and much more rule over the spirit to command obedience than to pay it.”

“ Yes, no doubt, one does not think enough of that. Jeremy Taylor, in his fine prayers, has one for a new married wife just about to enter a family—he teaches her to pray for ‘ a right judgment in all things—not to be annoyed at trifles—nor discomposed by contrariety of accidents,’—a spirit ‘ to overcome all my infirmities, and comply with and bear with the infirmities of others—giving offence to none, but doing good to all I can ;’—but I think he should have added a petition for strength to rule and guide that portion of the household which falls under her immediate care, with a firm and righteous hand, not fearing the face of man in an inferior more than in a superior.—Not yielding feebly to the undue encroachment of others—not suffering, through indolence or a mistaken love of peace, evil habits to creep over those who look up to us and depend upon us,—to their own infinite injury as well as to our own. Ah ! that is the part of a woman’s duty hardest to fulfil ; and I almost tremble,”

said the young bride elect, "when I think how heavy the responsibility ; and how hard I shall find it to acquit myself as I desire."

"In this, as in other things," answered Mrs. Danvers, affectionately passing her hand over her young favourite's smooth and shining hair, "I have ever observed there is but one source of real strength ; one force alone by which we can move mountains. But, in that strength we assuredly *are* able to move mountains. Was this all that you had to say, my dear ?"

"Oh, no ; but—it is so disagreeable—yet I think—Did you ever notice how things went on at home, my dear friend ?"

"Yes, a little I have. One cannot help, you know, if one stays long in a house, seeing the relation in which the different members of a family stand towards each other."

"I thought you must have done so ; that makes it easier for me to speak—well, then *that* was one great reason which made me so unwilling to leave mamma."

“I understand.”

“There is a vast deal of that sort of tyranny exercised in our family already. Ever since I have grown up, I have done all in my power to check it, by encouraging my poor dear mamma to exert a little spirit; but she is so gentle, so soft, so indulgent, and so affectionate!—for even *that* comes in her way. . . . She gets attached to everything around her. She cannot bear new faces—she gets fond of her servants, and cannot bear they should look vexed or dissatisfied, and this I think the servants know, and I am sorry to say, take advantage of. They venture to do as they like, because they think it will be too painful an exertion for her to change them.”

“Yes, my dear, that is exactly as things go on; not in your family alone, but in numbers that I could name if I chose. It is a very serious evil. It amounts to a sin in many households. The waste, the almost vicious luxury—the idleness that is allowed! The

positive loss of what might be so much better bestowed upon those who really want it, to the positive injury of those who do enjoy it ! The demoralising effect of pampered habits—the sins which are committed through the temptation of having nothing to do—all these will make, I fear, a dark catalogue against the masters and mistresses of families, when the sum of life is taken.—Masters who, because they have money in abundance, and hate trouble, allow all this misrule, and its attendant ill consequences upon the part of their dependants. Neglecting ‘to rule with diligence,’ as the apostle commands us ; and satisfied, provided they themselves escape suffering from the ill consequences—except so far as the diminution of their overflowing purses may perhaps be concerned—to overlook all sorts of vice and misconduct, so long as, some way or other, the duties which personally regard themselves are got through.—Few people seem to reflect upon the mischief they may be doing to these, their

half-educated fellow-creatures, by such negligence."

Catherine looked very grave, almost sorrowful, at this speech—she said—

"Poor mamma—but she *cannot* help it—indeed she cannot. She is all love, and is gentleness itself—the blessed one 'who thinketh no evil.' How can that Randall find in her heart to tease her, as I am sure she does!—Though mamma never complains. And then I am afraid, indeed, I feel certain, when I am gone, the evil will very greatly increase. You, perhaps, have observed," added she, lowering her voice, "that poor papa makes it particularly difficult in our family—doubly difficult. His old wounds, his injured arm, his age and infirmities, make all sorts of little comforts indispensable to him. He suffers so much bodily, and he suffers, too, so much from little inconveniences, that he cannot bear to have anything done for him in an unaccustomed way. Randall and Williams have lived

with us ever since I was five years old—when poor papa came back from Waterloo almost cut to pieces. And he is so fond of them he will not hear a complaint against them—not even from mamma. Oh ! it is not her fault—poor dear mamma !”

“No, my love, such a dreadful sufferer as the poor General too often is, makes things very difficult at times. I understand all that quite well ; but we are still only on the preamble of your discourse, my Catherine ; something more than vain lamentation is to come of it, I feel sure.”

“Yes—indeed. Dear, generous mamma ! She would not hear of my staying with her and giving up Edgar ; nor would she listen to what he was noble enough to propose, that he should abandon his profession, and come and live at the Hazels—rather than that I should feel that I was tampering with my duty, for his sake—dear fellow !”

And the tears stood in Catherine’s eyes.

“Nothing I could say would make her listen to it. I could hardly be sorry for Edgar’s sake. I knew what a sacrifice it would have been upon his part,—more than a woman ought to accept from a *lover*, I think,—a man in his dotage, as one may say. Don’t you think so too, ma’am.”

“Yes, my dear, indeed I do. Well, go on.”

“I have been so perplexed, so unhappy, so undecided what to do; so sorry to leave this dear, generous mother to the mercy of those servants of hers—whose influence, when she is alone, and with nobody to hearten her up a little, will be so terribly upon the increase—that I have not known what to do. But to-day, whilst I was dressing for dinner, a sudden, blessed thought came into my mind.—Really, just like a flash of light that seemed to put everything clear at once—and it is about that I want to consult you, if you will let me. That dear Lettice Arnold!—I knew her from a child.—You cannot think what a creature she

is. So sensible, so cheerful, so sweet-tempered, so self-sacrificing, yet so clever, and firm, and steady when necessary.—Mamma wants a daughter, and papa wants a reader and a backgammon player. Lettice Arnold is the very thing.”

Mrs. Danvers made no answer.

“Don’t you think so? Are you not sure? Don’t you see it?” asked poor Catherine, anxiously.

“Alas! my dear, there is one thing I can scarcely ever persuade myself to do; and that is—advise any one to undertake the part of humble friend.”

“Oh, dear! oh, dear! I know it’s a terrible place in general, and I can’t think why.”

“Because neither party in general understands the nature of the relation, nor the exchange of duty it implies. For want of proper attention to this, the post of governess is often rendered so unsatisfactory to one side, and so very uncomfortable to the other—but in

that case at least *something* is defined. In the part of the humble friend there is really nothing.—Everything depends upon the equity and good-nature of the first party, and the candour and good-will of the second. Equity not to exact too much,—good-nature to consult the comfort and happiness of the dependant.—On that dependant's side, candour in judging of what *is* exacted; and good-will cheerfully to do the best in her power to be amiable and agreeable.”

“I am not afraid of mamma. She will never be exacting. She will study the happiness of all who depend upon her; she only does it almost too much—as I sometimes think, to the sacrifice of her own comfort, and to the spoiling of them—and though papa is sometimes so suffering that he can't help being a little impatient, yet he is a perfect gentleman, you know. As for Lettice Arnold, if ever there was a person who knew ‘how to make the best of it,’ and sup cheerfully upon fried onions

when she had lost her piece of roast kid, it is she. Besides, she is so uniformly good-natured, that it is quite a pleasure to her to oblige.—The only danger between dearest mamma and Lettice will be—of their quarrelling which shall give up most to the other. But, joking apart, she is a vast deal more than I have said—she is a remarkably clever, spirited girl, and shows it when she is called upon. You cannot think how discreet, how patient, yet how firm, she can be. Her parents, poor people! were very difficult to live with, and were always running wrong. If it had not been for Lettice, affairs would have got into dreadful confusion. There is that in her so *right*, such an inherent downright sense of propriety and justice.—Somehow or other I am confident she will not let Randall tyrannize over mamma when I am gone.”

“Really,” said Mrs. Danvers, “what you say seems very reasonable. There are exceptions to every rule. It certainly is one of

mine to have as little as possible to do in recommending young women to the situation of humble friends. Yet in some cases I have seen all the comfort you anticipate arise to both parties from such a connexion; and I own I never saw a fairer chance presented than the present—provided Randall is not too strong for you all; which may be feared.”

“ Well, then, you do not *disadvise* me to talk to mamma about it; and I will write to you as soon as I possibly can; and you will be kind enough to negotiate with Lettice if you approve of the terms. As for Randall, she shall *not* be too hard for me. Now is my hour; I am in the ascendant, and I will win this battle or perish—that is, I will tell mamma I *won't* be married upon any other terms; and to have ‘Miss’ married is quite as great a matter of pride to Mrs. Randall as to that dearest of mothers.”

The contest with Mrs. Randall was as fierce as Catherine, in her worst anticipations, could have expected. That worthy personage set herself at once, as might have been expected, most doggedly against the plan. It, indeed, militated against all her schemes. She had intended to have everything far more than ever her own way when "Miss Catherine was gone;" and though she had no doubt, as she said, but that she should "keep the creature in her place," and "teach her there was only one mistress here" (which phrase usually means the maid, though it implies the lady), yet she had a sort of a misgiving upon the subject. There would be one at Mrs. Melwyn's ear as well as herself, and at, possibly, her master's too—which was of still more importance. And then "those sort of people are so artful and cantankerous. Oh! she'd seen enough of them in her day! Poor servants couldn't have a moment's peace with a creature like that in the house, spying about and telling everything in the parlour.

One can't take a walk—or see a poor friend—or have a bit of comfort, but all goes up there. Well, those may put up with it who like. Here's one as won't, and that's me myself; and so I shall make bold to tell Miss Catherine. General and Mrs. Melwyn must choose between me and the new-comer."

Poor Catherine! Mrs. Melwyn cried, and said her daughter was very right; but she was sure Randall never *would* bear it. And the General, with whom Randall had daily opportunity for private converse, while she bound up his shattered arm, and dressed the old wound, which was perpetually breaking out afresh and discharging splinters of bone, easily talked her master into the most decided dislike to the scheme.

But Catherine stood firm. She had the support of her own heart and judgment; and the greater the difficulty, the more strongly she felt the necessity of the measure. Edgar backed her, too, with all his might. He could

hardly keep down his vexation at this weakness on one side, or his indignation at the attempted tyranny on the other; and he said everything he could think of to encourage Catherine to persevere.

She talked the matter well over with her father. The General was the most testy, cross, and unreasonable of old men. Always out of humour, because always suffering, and always jealous of everybody's influence and authority; because he was now too weak and helpless to rule his family with a rod of iron, such as he, the greatest of martinets, had wielded in better days in his regiment and in his household alike. He suffered himself to be governed by Randall, and by nobody else; because in yielding to Randall, there was a sort of consciousness of the exercise of free will. He *ought* to be influenced by his gentle wife, and clever, sensible daughter; but there was no reason on earth—but because he *chose* to do it—that he should mind what Randall said.

“I hate the whole pack of them! I know well enough what sort of a creature you’ll bring amongst us, Catherine. A whining, methodistical old maid, with a face like a hatchet, and a figure as if it had been pressed between two boards, dressed in a flimsy cheap silk, of a dingy brown colour, and a cap like a grenadier’s.—Your mother and she will be sitting moistening their eyes all day long over the sins of mankind; and, I’ll be bound, my own sins won’t be forgotten between them.—Oh! I know the pious creatures of old. Nothing they hate like a poor old veteran, with a naughty word or two in his mouth now and then. Never talk to me, Catherine,—I can’t abide such cattle.”

“Dearest papa! what a picture you *do* draw! just to frighten yourself.—Why, Lettice Arnold is only about nineteen, I believe; and though she’s not particularly pretty, she’s the pleasantest-looking creature you ever saw. And as for bemoaning herself over her neigh-

bours' sins, I'll be bound she's not half such a methodist as Randall pretends to be."

"Randall is a very pious, good woman, I'd have you to know, Miss Catherine."

"I'm sure I hope she is, papa; but you must own she makes a great fuss about it. And I really believe, the habit she has of whimpering and turning up the whites of her eyes, when she hears of a neighbour's peccadillos, is one thing which sets you so against the righteous, dearest papa. Now, you know it is."

"You're a saucy baggage.—How old is this thing you're trying to put upon us, did you say?"

"Why, about nineteen,—or, perhaps, twenty. And, then, who's to read to you, papa, when I am gone, and play backgammon? You know mamma must *not* read on account of her chest,—and she plays so badly, you say, at backgammon,—and it's so dull, husband and wife playing, you know." (Poor Mrs. Melwyn

dreaded the backgammon above all things. She invariably got ridiculed if she played ill,—and put her husband into a passion if she beat him. Catherine had long taken this business upon herself.)

“Does she play backgammon tolerably? And can she read without drawling or galloping?”

“Just at your own pace, papa, whatever that may be. Besides, you can only try her,—she’s easily sent away if you and mamma don’t like her. And then think, she is a poor clergyman’s daughter;—and it would be quite a kind action.”

“A poor parson’s! It would have been more to the purpose if you had said a poor officer’s. I pay tithes enough to the black-coated gentlemen, without being bothered to maintain their children,—and who ever pays tithes to us, I wonder? I don’t see what right parsons have to marry at all,—and then, forsooth, come and ask other people to take care of their brats!”

“Ah! but she’s not to be taken care of for nothing. Only think what a comfort she’ll be!”

“To your mamma, perhaps; but not to me. And *she’s* always the first person to be considered in this house, I know, very well.—And I know very well who it is that dresses the poor old soldier’s wounds, and studies his comforts,—and he’ll study hers,—and I won’t have her vexed to please any of you.”

“But why should she be vexed? It’s nothing to *her*. *She’s* not to live with Lettice. And, I must say, if Randall sets herself against this measure, she behaves in a very unreasonable and unworthy manner, in my opinion.”

“Hoity toity! *To* be sure; and who’s behaving in an unreasonable and unworthy manner now, I wonder—abusing her behind her back; a worthy, attached creature, whose sole object it is to study the welfare of us all? *She’s* told me so a thousand times.”

“I dare say. Well, now, papa, listen to me. I’m going away from you for good,—your little Catherine. Just for once, grant me this as a favour. Only try Lettice. I’m sure you’ll like her; and if, after she’s been here a quarter of a year, you don’t wish to keep her, why part with her; and I’ll promise not to say a word about it. Randall has her good qualities, I suppose, like the rest of the world; but Randall must be taught to keep her place, and that’s not in this drawing-room. And it’s *here* you want Lettice,—not in your dressing-room. Randall shall have it all her own way *there*,—and that *ought* to content her. And besides, papa, do you know, I can’t marry Edgar till you have consented, because I cannot leave mamma and you with nobody to keep you company.”

“Edgar and you be d——d! Well, do as you like. The sooner you’re out of the house the better. I shan’t have my own way till you’re gone. You’re a sad coaxing baggage,

but you *have* a pretty face of your own, Miss Catherine."

If the debate upon the subject ran high at the Hazels, so did it in the little humble apartment which the two sisters occupied.

"A humble friend! No," cried Myra, "that I would never, never be—rather die of hunger first."

"Dying of hunger is a very horrible thing," said Lettice, quietly, "and much more easily said than done. We have not, God be thanked for it, ever been quite so badly off as that;—but I have stood near enough to the dreadful gulf to look down, and to sound its depth and its darkness. I am very thankful—deeply thankful—for this offer, which I should gladly accept—only, what is to become of you?"

"Oh! never mind me. It's the fashion

now, I see, for everybody to think of *you*, and nobody to think of me. I'm not worth caring for, now—Those who cared for me are gone. Oh! pray, if you like to be a domestic slave yourself, let *me* be no hindrance."

"A domestic slave!—Why should I be a domestic slave? I see no slavery in the case."

"*I* call it slavery, whatever *you* may do, to have nothing to do all day but play toad-eater and flatterer to a good-for-nothing old woman—to bear all her ill-humours, and be the butt for all her caprices. That's what humble friends are expected to do, I believe,—what else are they hired for?"

"I should neither toady nor flatter, I hope," said Lettice; "and as for bearing people's ill-humours, and being, now and then, the sport of their caprices,—why that, as you say, is very disagreeable, yet, perhaps, it is what one who accepts such a place must rather expect. But Mrs. Melwyn, I have always heard, is the gentlest of human beings. And if she is like

Catherine, she must be free from caprice, and nobody could help quite loving her."

"Stuff!—love!—love! A humble friend love her *un-humble* friend—for I suppose one must not venture to call one's mistress a tyrant. Oh, no, she's a friend! — a dear friend!" in a taunting, ironical voice.

"Whomever it might be my fate to live with, I should *try* to love; for I believe if one tries to love people, one soon finds something lovable about them—and Mrs. Melwyn, I feel sure, I should soon love very much."

"So like you!—ready to love anything and everything. I verily believe if there was nothing else to love but the little chimney-sweeper boy, you'd fall to loving him, rather than love nobody."

"I am sure that's true enough," said Lettice, laughing; "I have more than once felt very much inclined to love the little boy who carries the soot-bag for the man who sweeps these chimneys—such a saucy-looking little sooty rogue!"

"As if a person's love *could* be worth having," continued the sister, "who is so ready to love anybody."

"No, that I deny. Some few people I *do* find it hard to love."

"Me for one."

"Oh, Myra!"

"Well, I beg your pardon. You're very kind to me. But I'll tell you who it will be impossible for you to love—if such a thing can be—that's that testy, cross, old General."

"I don't suppose I shall have much to do with the old General, if I go."

"*If* you go. Oh, you're sure to go. You're so sanguine; every new prospect is so promising. But pardon me, you seem quite to have forgotten that reading to the old General, and playing backgammon with him, are among your specified employments."

"Well, I don't see much harm in it if they are. A man can't be very cross with one when one's reading to him—and as for the

backgammon, I mean to lose every game I play, if that will please him."

"Oh, a man can't be cross with a reader, say you! I wish you knew as much of the world as I do, and had seen people being read to. Why, nothing on earth puts one in such a fidget. I'm sure I've been put into such a worry by people's way of reading, that I could have pinched them. Really, Lettice, your simplicity would shame a child of five years old."

"Well, I shall do my best, and besides I shall take care to set my chair so far off that I can't get pinched, at least; and as for a poor, ailing, suffering old man being a little impatient and cross, why one can't expect to get fifty pounds a-year for just doing nothing.—I do suppose it is expected that I should bear a few of these things in place of Mrs. Melwyn; and I don't see why I should not."

"Oh, dear!—Well, my love, you're quite made for the place, I see; you always had

something of the spaniel in you, or the walnut-tree, or any of those things which are the better for being ill-used.—It was quite a proverb with our poor mother, ‘a worm will turn, but not Lettice.’”

Lettice felt very much inclined to turn now. But the mention of her mother—that mother whose mismanagement and foolish indulgence had contributed so much to poor Myra’s faults—faults for which she now paid so heavy a penalty—silenced the generous girl, and she made no answer.

No answer, let it proceed from never so good a motive, makes cross people often more cross; though perhaps upon the whole it is the best plan.

So Myra, in a still more querulous voice, went on:—

“This room will be rather dismal all by one’s self, and I don’t know how I’m to go about up and down, fetch and carry, and work as you are able to do. . . . I was never used to

it. It comes very hard upon me." And she began to cry.

"Poor Myra! dear Myra! don't cry: I never intended to leave you. Though I talked as if I did, it was only in the way of argument, because I thought more might be said for the kind of life than you thought; and I felt sure if people were tolerably kind and candid, I could get along very well, and make myself quite comfortable. Dear me! after such hardships as we have gone through, a little would do that. But do you think, poor dear girl, I could have a moment's peace, and know you were here alone? No, no."

And so, when she went in the evening to carry her answer to Mrs. Dauvers, who had conveyed to her Catherine's proposal, Lettice said, "that she should have liked exceedingly to have accepted Catherine's offer, and was sure she should have been very happy herself, and would have done everything in her power

to make Mrs. Melwyn happy, but that it was impossible to leave her sister."

"If that is your only difficulty, my dear, don't make yourself uneasy about it. I have found a place for your sister which I think she will like very well. It is with Mrs. Fisher, the great milliner in Dover-street, where she will be taken good care of, and may be very comfortable. Mrs. Fisher is a most excellent person, and very anxious, not only about the health and comfort of those she employs, but about their good behaviour and their security from evil temptation.—Such a beautiful girl as your sister is, lives in perpetual danger, exposed as she is without protection in this great town."

"But Myra has such an abhorrence of servitude, as she calls it—such an independent high spirit—I fear she will never like it."

"It will be very good for her, whether she likes it or not. Indeed, my dear, to speak sincerely, the placing your sister out of danger in

the house of Mrs. Fisher, ought to be a decisive reason with you for accepting Catherine's proposal—even did you dislike it much more than you seem to do."

"Oh! to tell the truth, I should like the plan very much indeed—much more than I have wished to say, on account of Myra. But she never, never will submit to be ruled, I fear, and make herself happy where, of course, she must obey orders and follow regulations, whether she likes them or not. Unfortunately, poor dear, she has been so little accustomed to be contradicted."

"Well, then, it is high time she should begin to learn; for contradicted, sooner or later, we all of us are certain to be. Seriously, again, my dear, good Lettice—I must call you Lettice—your innocence of heart prevents you from knowing what snares surround a beautiful young woman like your sister. I like you best, I own; but I have thought much more of her fate than yours, upon that

account. Such a situation as is offered to you she evidently is quite unfit to fill; but I went—the very day Catherine and I came to your lodgings, and saw you both—to my good friend Mrs. Fisher, and, with great difficulty, have persuaded her at last to take your sister. She disliked the idea very much. But she's an excellent woman: and when I represented to her the peculiar circumstances of the case, she promised she would consider the matter. She took a week to consider of it—for she is a very cautious person is Mrs. Fisher; and some people call her very cold and severe. However, she has decided in our favour, as I expected she would. Her compassion always gets the better of her prudence, when the two are at issue. . . . And so you would not dislike to go to Mrs. Melwyn's?"

"How could I? Why, after what we have suffered, it must be like going into Paradise."

"Nay, nay—a little too fast. No de-

pendant situation is ever exactly a Paradise. I should be sorry you saw things in a false light, and should be disappointed."

"Oh, no, I do not wish to do that—I don't think—thank you for the great kindness and interest you are so kind as to show me by this last remark—but I think I never in my life enjoyed one day of unmixed happiness since I was quite a little child. And I have got so entirely into the habit of thinking that everything in the world goes so,—that when I say Paradise, or quite happy, or so on, it is always in a certain sense—a comparative sense."

"I am glad to see you so reasonable—that is one sure way to be happy; but you will find your crosses at the Hazels. The General is not very sweet-tempered; and even dear, mild Mrs. Melwyn is not perfect."

"Why, madam, what am I to expect? If I cannot bear a few disagreeable things, what do I go there for? Not to be fed, and

housed, and paid at other people's expense, just that I may please my own humours all the time. That *would* be rather an unfair bargain, I think. No: I own there are some things I could not and would not bear for any consideration; but there are a great many others that I can, and I shall, and I will—and do my best, too, to make happy, and be happy; and, in short, I don't feel the least afraid."

"No more you need, you right-spirited creature," said Mrs. Danvers, cordially.

Many were the difficulties, endless the objections, raised by Myra against the proposed plan of going to Mrs. Fisher. Such people's objections and difficulties are indeed endless. In their weakness and their selfishness, they *like* to be objects of pity—they take a comfort

in bothering and wearying people with their interminable complaints. There is a sort of dignity, as they think, in being very ill-used, very much oppressed, very much to be pitied, to which, in default of all other means of asserting their self-consequence, they obstinately cling. They do not wish, they cannot bear, to be cheered by the attempt to place their circumstances in the most wretchedness light,—they like to be thought miserable,—they like to have other people miserable about them.

Their complaints are not the sacred outbreak of the overloaded heart, overpowered for the moment by the weight of its own wretchedness, casting itself upon another heart for support and consolation under suffering that is too strong and too bitter to be endured alone. Sacred call for sympathy and consolation, and made in vain! It is the wearying and futile attempt to throw the burden upon others, instead of seeking their assistance in struggling

under it ourselves. Vain and useless endeavour!
And which often bears hard upon the sympathy
even of the kindest and truest hearts!

In vain Lettice went on endeavouring to
represent matters under a cheerful aspect.
Myra would persist in grieving and tormenting
herself.

“Now don’t, Myra, say that,” Lettice in
vain went on, “don’t go on making matters so
much worse than they are. What use is there
in looking back? The past is over, and can-
not be helped now—even if it ever could have
been helped; and I don’t see how it ever
could.”

“A clergyman’s daughter!—A beneficed
clergyman’s daughter!—And to become a mil-
liner’s apprentice! One a humble friend, and
the other a milliner’s apprentice! Well, Mrs.
Danvers is a mighty clever and a mighty pious
woman, I dare say; but I think she might
have found something more appropriate for
me—for both of us.”

“It’s a very difficult thing, indeed, Myra, as you know very well, for young women to be placed in situations, so as to get their own living. These are both thoroughly respectable situations, and I do not see why we should complain of them.”

“To have to get one’s own living!”

“Why, to be sure, it must be pleasanter to have a nice independent fortune; but how many in this world have that?”

“Why hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds, no better than we. Look at Catherine!”

“Yes, but you should think of the hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds, as you say, that are quite as good as we, and are not one quarter so well off as we are going to be. Myra, you seem to forget that we ought to look at those better than ourselves, when we are comparing qualities; and at those below ourselves when we are comparing circumstances—think of the wise man who said so.”

“I’m not likely to forget that, or anything else, when you are always so ready to preach to me. And I’ll tell you what, Lettice, fine words don’t heal wounds;—and when I am cut to the very heart by thinking of the difference between what I might have been, and what everybody expected I should have been, and what I am,—I don’t think it so particularly kind of you to go on preaching and philosophising, and taking other people’s misfortunes so mighty easily.”

“But what’s the good of making the worst of things? And besides, after all, I believe you like your place better than mine.”

“Place! What a word!—place! Yes, you are quite right,—*place*. What are we better, either of us, than servants? You a sort of upper lady’s maid, and I a milliner’s apprentice.”

“I don’t see the use of giving things disagreeable names, Myra, and then fretting about them.”

"*I* give disagreeable names! Why, you began first. I think it was Miss Lettice that talked of our going to our *places*."

"Dear Myra," said Lettice, recovering her good humour, "call them what you will, but only just think,—it won't be so disagreeable after all. Only think what a pretty taste you have in dress, and how easy and pleasant it will be to you to be making up caps, and turbans, and head-dresses, instead of stitching away at that everlasting white seam."

"But they say Mrs. Fisher's horrid severe."

"No, indeed, that's not the character Mrs. Danvers gives of her at all. She says she's very kind and considerate. And besides now, Myra, only think how pleasant it will be among all those beautiful things, and to be walking about, and showing them off, and selling. I think it must be quite amusing—so entertaining watching people's humours and fancies, and so nice when one gets a thing

sold, and hears the money rattle upon the table."

So urged and so argued good Lettice, and so persisted she in endeavouring to place her sister's prospects in the fairest and most captivating light; and so persisted Myra in recapitulating every objection which could be made to the plan, and every evil consequence which could possibly ensue.

Not that she had the slightest intention in the world of refusing her assent. If she would but have suffered herself to own it, she rather liked the idea, after all, of going to that fashionable *modiste*, Mrs. Fisher, and quite entered into the view Lettice took of the subject. She had, in the full force of the expression, "*l'âme de dentelle*," with which Napoleon reproached poor Josephine. There was something positively delightful to her imagination in the idea of dwelling among rich silks, Brussels laces, ribbons, and feathers. They were

to her what woods, and birds, and trees were to her sister. She fancied herself elegantly dressed, walking about a show-room, filled with all sorts of beautiful things; herself perhaps, the most beautiful thing in it, and the object of a sort of flattering interest, through the melancholy cloud "upon her fine features." Nay, her romantic imagination travelled still farther,—gentlemen sometimes come up with ladies to show-rooms,—who could tell? Love at first sight was not altogether a dream. Such things *had* happened. . . . Myra had read plenty of old rubbishy novels when she was a girl.

Such were the comfortable thoughts she kept to herself; but it was, as I said, one endless complaining externally.

Catherine insisted upon being allowed to advance the money for the necessary clothes, which, to satisfy the delicacy of the one, and the pride of the other, she agreed should be repaid by instalments, as their salaries became

due. The sale of their few possessions put a sovereign or so into the pocket of each, and the sisters parted; Lettice shedding plentiful tears, as she kissed her sister again and again. There was not much to love in that sister, to be sure; but Lettice possessed that richest of treasures to the possessor, a warm, affectionate heart. Something she must love; and was not Myra her sister, and her only sister?

Moreover, she had been very kind to Myra, and had been unwearied in her endeavours to minister to her comfort, and supply, as far as in her lay, by numberless simple expedients, those necessities which Myra's susceptible, nervous, and relaxed habits rendered at times so urgent.—And, it is a curious fact in human nature,—but I think I have often observed it,—that people love others rather for the benefits they bestow, than for those they receive. Indeed, gratitude, though I think it one of the sweetest of feelings, when it is honestly inspired, seems to me a very rare one, whether it

be that the pride of human nature recoils at the sense of an obligation, or whether it be that benefactors really want a certain grace in bestowing, and so associate disagreeable feelings with their benefits.

There is a grace in giving, as well as a grace in receiving. Lettice certainly was not wanting in the one, but I am afraid Myra was sadly deficient in the other.

However, the tears were in her beautiful star-like eyes, while those of Lettice flowed abundantly down her round, honest cheeks.

“We must write often to one another, dear Myra,” sobbed Lettice.

“To be sure we must, Lettice—to be sure we must. We shall have a great deal to tell one another.”

“And, Myra, dear,” looking up in her face with such an earnest, begging look—begging so earnestly of her sister to consult her own good, “Myra, dear, you will try, won’t you, to be pleased and contented with what turns up;

because, you know, it makes one so acceptable to other people, if one can contrive to look comfortable. You must try not to mind little this and thats more than you can help, Myra. You know I shall not be there."

"I don't suppose I am so *very* much harder to please than other people, though I *have* been used to better things," was the reply, in a somewhat offended tone. The very softest form in which a little advice of this nature can be couched, is powerless to prevent the susceptible self-love of some people from being offended. "And I don't know why you are always insinuating and preaching to me. I am your eldest sister, you know, and perhaps when we *do* go out into the world, it may appear that I am not such a *very* bad person to get along, though I mayn't be to the taste of a stiff old prude like Mrs. Danvers, quite so much as you, Lettice. Thank goodness, the world is not all made up of Mrs. Danverses."

"No, indeed," withdrawing her arms from her sister's neck, and turning away, to nail the cards she had written for both, upon their several boxes.

"I wonder who's offended now!" said Myra, for she felt the tacit reproof.

But Lettice could not just at that moment venture to say anything. What she had not felt for herself, she felt for her benefactress. Lettice felt too angry at that moment to speak.

"I wonder who's touchy now!" Myra went on. "That *is* rather too good. If I venture to speak a word of my mind, all the world's up against me in a minute, and you among the first, Lettice; and yet you've been preaching to me for an hour. I don't think it kind, Lettice,"—

As her sister still remained silent, with her back towards her, busy nailing the cards upon the box,—

“And just as we are going to part, too.”

And Myra began to whimper.

It might have tried the patience of Job more than even his own wife did.

But it was true they were going to part, and the heart of Lettice gave way. She rose from her knees, and turning to her sister, with a face, from which every cloud of resentment had vanished, said,

“Indeed, dear, what you say is true—it would be dreadful to part any way but kindly. I am sure, for my part, if I did so, come what would of it, I should never rest till I had flown back to London to make it up with you, Myra. There—there—let us kiss and be friends; and I am very sorry if I said anything to vex you,—I did not intend it, indeed. And see how tidy our boxes do look, now they are packed up and directed. I must say I think it was particularly nice of dear Catharine, after giving us so many things, to remember how respectable it looks, on coming to

new places, to have a handsome box,—especially for me, who am going among grand servants, who think so much of these things ; —and a railway padlock, too. Now those little things seem to me even kinder than the great things.—And see what a neat little lock and key to yours—a key you can carry about in your pocket so comfortably. She is a good, dear, kind creature, is Catherine Melwyn, that she is,—and heaven bless her for it.”

“ Yes, she’s good-natured, and has been very good-natured about the things ; but as for blessings, I think she’s got her full share of them, at all events. You might wish heaven to bless you and me, if you were wishing, I think.”

“ And so I do—so I do ; but sure there are blessings enough in heaven for us all ; there need be no begrudgings there. There’s room enough in the universe for all God’s creatures, heaven be praised for it.”

“Different people have very different places in it, however,” said Myra, moodily ; for she looked at her small box, and she thought of Catherine’s *trousseau*, which she had been allowed to see, at least the part of it provided in London, and of the carriage-seats, imperials, and trunks innumerable, fitted to Edgar’s carriage, and standing ready to be packed.

Myra compared her wardrobe with what Catherine’s was—Lettice, with what her own had been. It was the same object seen on opposite sides ;—this was all the difference.

It made a great one in the sum total of their lives.

However, now the cab came to the door, in which Lettice was to convey Myra to Mrs. Fisher’s, on her own way to the railway station, whence she was to be conveyed down to the Hazels.

At a tall, handsome-looking mansion in Dover Street, the cab accordingly stopped. Myra had been there before, when she had

been introduced to Mrs. Fisher. Lettice saw it for the first time.

"This is a nice house to live in, however, Myra," said she, delighted with the appearance of things.

"Yes," said Myra, pleased, and her pride somewhat elevated, as her sister looked up at the lofty front, with its four rows of handsome windows. "Not such a very bad place to be at, I must own, Lettice; and I hope," she had the grace to add, "you'll like General Melwyn's as well."

"Here, you stupid fellow," to the coachman, "that's *my* box. How stupid these cabmen are! Hold it up, will you—you're turning it all upside down. Hold it up, can't you!" she repeated, in that tone of voice so shrill and harsh, peculiar to the less worthy gender, and peculiarly irritating, perhaps, on that account, to the more worthy.

"Can't! I suppose I can if I will," answered the man, surlily; "but people may

speak civilly, at all events. I suppose you're not one of them title ladies, a going to buy trumpery at this Mrs. Fisher's. One may see you ain't by your manners,—their's are a power civiller."

"You are an insolent fellow," said Myra, scornfully, "that I know."

"Hush, hush! Myra," as the man was beginning to reply; and Lettice, horrified at the idea of a quarrel with a hackney-cab man in the street, got out of the carriage.

"And why should I hush?" turning sharply upon her sister, for her temper was up. "Am I to be insulted by a hackney-cab man?"

"Shouldn't begin first, then, my pretty Miss.—Civility begets civility; and, perhaps, cabman as I be, I understand that as well as you do—improver as you are, I suppose"—for, with the ready penetration of his calling, he guessed in a moment that she was no "born lady," as he called it.

She was about to reply, but Lettice, in much distress, turned to the cabman, and said, "My sister was only vexed about your turning the box wrong way upwards, because her best bonnet is in it, and it would be very inconvenient to have it spoiled. Please to set it down carefully, and I'll remember it when we come to the end of the job."

"Fair speaking is better worth than a haditional sixpence," responded the man, "though that's not bad in its way,"—and, turning to Myra, as he set her box carefully down upon the steps at the door of Mrs. Fisher's house, "You're a power prettier than your sister, and that may be it is, which makes you so saucy; but it was a wiser one than either you or I who said, 'As a jewel of gold in a swine's mouth, so is beauty in a woman that hath no understanding.'"

Myra was too much affronted, and too much mortified at this concluding speech, to

do aught but hastily mount the steps, as Mrs. Fisher's footman opened the door.

Lettice was too happy to have her safely in, to think of any farewells, her sister's dress waving, as the door closed upon her, was the last thing she saw. She re-entered the cab,—the cabman standing holding the door for her, with a look of extra assiduity, as if to atone for his incivility to one sister, by his attention to the other. Asking her, in a voice respectful, as if she had been a title lady herself—for he thought her as well-mannered as one—where he was next to drive her.

She arrived safely at the railway station, settled with her cabman, who, in taking off her box, he it observed, took especial care to keep the direction-side uppermost. And so the lovely Myra was settled at Mrs. Fisher's. Lettice, quite tired out with the emotions and worries of the morning, was glad to be seated in silence, and enjoy the comforts of a first-

class railway carriage,—for so it had been arranged for her by Catherine and Mrs. Danvers,—and to be whisked, with something of the speed of light, to the Hazels.

CHAPTER V.

Since trifles make the sum of human things . . .
Oh! let the ungentle spirit learn from thence,
A small unkindness is a great offence:
Large favours to bestow we strive in vain,
But all may shun the guilt of giving pain.

HANNAH MORE.

I HAVE given you to understand, I hope, that Lettice was not one to enter upon a situation, or engage in a charge such as the one she is about to undertake, without having cast her thoughts forward, and anticipating, as well as she could, the difficulties, temptations, and trials of one sort or other, which

she was likely to meet with. Nor that she had neglected to reflect upon the manner in which they ought to be met; or upon the right means of winning her way among them, so as to provide best for the comfort of others and herself.

She had thought much since the place had been accepted, in this way; and though she could not, of course, be precisely aware in what form the difficulties and the trials of her temper and good sense would present themselves, still she knew enough of herself, human nature, and human life, to be certain that present themselves they would. I would not have you suppose, because I do not in this story think proper very often to introduce the subject,—I would not have you suppose that this good girl rested her hopes of succeeding in that upon which her heart was set—the being a comfort to Mrs. Melwyn, and a source of satisfaction to her dear Catherine—upon her own good sense and good resolutions alone.

She knew where to seek a strength—behind, as it were—and stronger than her own strength—a sort of supply of fresh life, flowing in, warming her heart, and invigorating her resolutions.

We have all need of this strength—though many think they can, and some seem, for a time, to be able to do without it, in the pride of that natural force which the Creator has given in greater or less degree to each of us. But most, even of the strongest, find their self-dependence fail in the hour of temptation or distress, though they frequently long remain unaware of their wants. It is only such as have sought and found such help in their needs, who are fully sensible of the inestimable value—perhaps even of the very existence of such influences. Jeremy Taylor, among his wise and valuable helps to devotion, has a prayer for “Holy intention in the beginning and pursuit of any considerable action, &c.”

The book, we know, was a favourite with Catherine, for she has already alluded to it. She had given a copy of it to each of the sisters. The title of this little compendium, if you wish to know it, is—"A Selection from the Prayers of Jeremy Taylor," and it is published by Hatchard, Piccadilly.

The temptation is very strong with me to copy an extract from it: those who already know the book will forgive me; those who do not, perhaps thank me.

"Lord, turn my necessities into virtue. The works of nature into the works of grace, by making them orderly, regular, temperate, subordinate, and profitable to ends beyond their proper efficacy. And let no pride or self-seeking, no covetousness or revenge, no impure mixture or unhandsome purposes, no little ends and low imaginations, pollute my spirit, and unhallow my words and actions," &c. &c.

I am afraid the prayer-book given to one

sister was not used with the careful attention that followed the pages of the other. The gentle morning and evening discipline of honest prayer was wanting in one case—most blessed in its effects in the other. But I must proceed with my little story.

If Lettice had made her reflections, and had started upon her new undertaking with a heart thus yearning with the desire to perform its duties well, Mrs. Melwyn had not been without undergoing a somewhat similar process upon her side, and this had been her course of thought:—

She had, you must know, at first felt the utmost dislike to the plan.

She had, in the course of her life, seen so much discomfort and dissatisfaction arise upon both sides from this sort of connexion, that she had taken up quite a prejudice against anything of the sort.

“It was a very great pity,” she often had said to herself, “that so it should be, but the

case was almost universal. If it could be otherwise, what desirable connexions might be formed in a world such as the present? Such numbers of women as there are, of all ages, and of all degrees of mental qualifications, who find themselves suddenly without resource, through the accident of early death in the case of the professions, or of disaster in commercial life—and so many others, who, through disease or advanced age, or the still more cruel stroke of death, find themselves stranded, lonely and deserted, and languishing for a fire-side friend. What a pity that they cannot be brought comfortably together, so as to be of use to one another! What comfortable, beneficial unions might be brought about in such cases, one should think! And yet why do they never or seldom turn out well?

“Faults there must be. Where do they lie? On both sides,” answered her understanding. “Not surely alone upon the side of the new-comer—the paid one, consequently the obliged

one, consequently the only one of the parties who had duties that she was pledged to perform, though, it is true, too often very imperfectly performed,—but quite as probably upon the other. Upon the part of the superior, though that superior is so slow to acknowledge it,—and often so insensible to the duty of watching over the performance of her own part of the engagement, whilst she is so ready to detect the fallings-off—as fallings-off there will infallibly be to be detected—upon the other side. It is true the patron has absolutely engaged for nothing, but the providing meat, lodging, and salary ; but that will not dispense her from obligations as a Christian, and as a member of the universal sisterhood, which are not quite so easily discharged.

“It must double the difficulty to the new comer,” thought Mrs. Melwyn, “the being treated so carelessly as she too often is. How hard it must be to perform duties such as hers, if they are not performed in love! And how

impossible it must be to love in such a case—unless we meet with love. Even to be treated with consideration and kindness will not suffice upon the one side, nor the most scrupulous endeavour to discharge the duty upon the other,—people must try to *love*.

“How soothing to a poor deserted orphan to be taken to the heart! How sweet to forlorn old age to find a fresh object of affection! Ah, but then these sort of people seem often so disagreeable, do one’s best, one cannot love or like them! But why do they seem so disagreeable? Partly because people will overlook nothing—have no mutual indulgence in relations which require so much. If one’s child has little ways one does not quite like, who thinks of hating her for it? If one’s mother is a little provoking and tedious under the oppressive weight of years or sickness, who thinks of making a great hardship of it? But, if the poor humble friend is only a little awkward or ungainly, she is odious;

and if the poor deserted mother or widow, or aged suffering creature, is a little irritable or tedious, oh ! she is *such* a tyrant !

“ Ah ! how I wish !

“ Well, Catherine is a sensible, well-judging creature, and she assures me this Miss Arnold is a remarkably sweet-tempered, affectionate, modest, judicious girl. Why should I not try to make such a being love me—why should we not be very happy together ? There is Randall, to be sure, sets herself extremely against it ; but, as Catherine says, ‘ Is Randall to be mistress in this family, or am I ? ’ It is come quite to that point. And then it will be a great thing to have somebody between me and Randall. She will not be so necessary to me then, whatever she may be to the General—and when she makes herself so disagreeable, if this young lady is as comfortable to me as Catherine says she will be—I really shall not so much care.

“ Then,” continuing her meditations, which,

though I put down in black and white, were *thought*, not spoken, “then, Catherine says she is so greatly to be pitied, and is so exemplary! And she said, in her darling coaxing way, ‘Dear mamma, it will give you so much pleasure to make the poor thing a little amends for all her hardships; and if poor papa is a little cross to her at times, it will be quite an interest to you to contrive to make up for it. She will be quite a daughter to you; and, in one respect, you will have more pleasure in making her happy than even in making your own loving daughter so happy as you have done—because the one is dear from your tender natural affections, and the other will be so from generous beneficence,—and though natural affection is such a sweet, precious, inestimable thing, generous beneficence is yet nobler, and brings us still nearer to God.’

“If I could make this Miss Arnold love me!—And with such an affectionate temper, as Catherine says she has, why should I not?

She wants a parent, I want a child. If I study her happiness disinterestedly, kindly, truly, she cannot help loving me ; but I will not even think of myself, I will try to study *her* good, *her* well-being, and I will let the love for me come or not as it may, and God will help me. He always does help me,—when I have the courage to dare to forget myself, and leave the issue of things to His Providence.”

Such were the dispositions upon both sides with which the two met. But the best resolutions win no battle. They are part, and a very serious part of every undertaking, but they are far from being all. We are so imperfect ourselves, and we have to do with such imperfect beings, that evils and difficulties unexpected, are sure to arise in our communication with others, even when both sides meet with the very best intentions. Therefore, whoever intends to carry out such good intentions, and make a right piece of work of it, must calculate, as I have said, upon these things ;

just as the mechanic is obliged to make a large allowance for unavoidable obstructions in carrying out any of his theories into action and reality,—into useful, every-day, working order.

In due time, a fly from the railway—one of those dirty hired carriages which are the disgrace of England—deposited Miss Arnold and her luggage at the door of General Melwyn's handsome mansion of the Hazels, and in all due form and order she was introduced into the drawing-room. It was between six and seven o'clock in the evening when she entered the very handsomely-furnished apartment, where, over a half-and-half sort of fire—it having been rather a warm February day—sat the General and his lady.

Lettice was tired, heated, and red with the jumbling of the railway, the bother at the station, and the knocking about in the very uneasy fly in which she had come up some miles. She felt in that disagreeable sort of journey disorder of toilette, which makes

people feel and look so awkward. But she put the best face upon the matter, and entering, made a very respectful curtsy to Mrs. Melwyn, who met her, holding out her hand, and with whose face and appearance Lettice felt charmed in a moment. Mrs. Melwyn, who did not want penetration, saw that, in Lettice, spite of present disadvantages, which she was sure she should like very much. Not so the General. He was a perfect fool of the eye, as military men are apt to be. Whatever was awkward or ill-dressed, was perfectly abhorrent to him ; and he took a dislike to "the creature" the moment he cast his eyes upon her.

It seemed but an unpromising beginning.

The heart of poor Lettice sank within her in a way she was little accustomed to, as the

General, in a very pettish mood, stirred the fire, and said, "When *are* we to have dinner, Mrs. Melwyn? What *are* we waiting for? Will you never teach that cook of yours to be punctual?"

"It is not her fault, indeed," was the answer, in a low, timid voice; "I ventured to order dinner to be put off half an hour, to suit the railway time."

The General was too well bred to utter what he very plainly looked—that to have been thus kept waiting for Miss Arnold he thought a very unwarrantable proceeding indeed.

He stirred up the fire with additional vigour—made it blaze fiercely,—then complained of these abominable coals, which burned like touchwood, and had no heat in them, and wondered whether Mrs. Melwyn would ever have the energy to order sea-borne coal, as he had desired. Then, casting a most ungracious look at the new comer, who stood

during this scene, feeling awkward and uncomfortable to a degree, he asked Mrs. Melwyn "How long she intended to keep the young lady standing there before she dressed for dinner?" and suggested that the housemaid should be sent for, to show her to her room.

"I will take that office upon myself," said Mrs. Melwyn. "Come, Miss Arnold, will you follow me?" And, lighting a candle, for it was now dark, she proceeded towards the door.

"For heaven's sake don't be long!" said her husband, in an irritable tone; "It's striking six and three-quarters. *Is* dinner to be upon the table at seven o'clock, or is it not?"

"Punctually."

"Then, Miss—Miss—I beg your pardon—and Mrs. Melwyn, I *hope* you will be ready to take your usual place at table."

They heard no more; for Mrs. Melwyn closed the door with the air of one escaping,—and, looking uncomfortable and half frightened, led the way upstairs.

It was a pretty, cheerful little room, of which she opened the door ; and a pleasant fire was blazing in the grate. The bed was of white dimity, trimmed with a border of coloured chintz, as were the window-curtains ; the carpet quite new, and uncommonly pretty ; chairs, dressing-table, writing-table, all very neat and elegant, and the tables comfortably covered each with its proper appendages.

It was quite a delightful little den.

Mrs. Melwyn had taken much pleasure in the fitting-up of this small room, which was next to her own dressing-room. She had fancied herself going to receive into it a second Catherine ; and though the very moderate amount of money of which she had the power of disposing as she pleased, and the noisy remonstrances and objections of Randall, had prevented her indulging in many pretty fancies which would have amused and occupied her pleasantly since the dismal day of Catherine's wedding, still she had persisted, contrary

to her wont, in having in some degree her own way. So, in spite of all Randall could do, she had discarded the ugly old things,—which the lady's maid, excessively jealous of this new comer, declared were more than too good for such as her—and had substituted this cheerful simplicity which the air of freshness and newness cast over everything rendered particularly pleasing.

“What a beautiful little room!” Lettice could not help exclaiming, looking excessively delighted. She liked pretty things and elegant little comforts as well as anybody, did Lettice, though they seldom fell to her share, because she was always for giving them up to other people.

“Do you like it, my dear?” said Mrs. Melwyn, in what Lettice thought the sweetest, softest voice she had ever heard. “I have taken great pleasure in getting it ready for you. I shall be glad, indeed, if you can make yourself happy in it.”

“Happy! Who could help being happy in such a Paradise?” “And with such a sweet, gentle, charming person as Mrs. Melwyn,” mentally added Lettice. “What matters it how cross the poor old General is,” thought she.

“But, my dear, I don’t see your trunks. Will you ring the bell for them? The General must not be kept waiting for his dinner, and he cannot endure those who sit down at his table, either to be too late, or not to be in an evening dress. Military men, you know, are so used to this sort of precision, that they expect it from all around them. You will remember another day, my dear, and—” then the under housemaid opened the door. “Tell them to bring up Miss Arnold’s trunks, directly.”

Them.

She did not at that moment exactly know which was the proper servant whose office it ought to be to carry Miss Arnold’s trunks.

Miss Arnold was an anomaly. There was no precedent. A Miss Arnold had never been in the family before. What *was* to be done? Precedent, as I told you, there was not to be found, and what servant in the General's family would stir without a precedent? The trunk was probably too heavy for the under housemaid to carry up,—that under housemaid, one of the fags usually kept in a household like this, merely to do what the upper servants are too fine or too idle to do. In domestic systems like the one before us, you must have two in every department (you may consider yourself very lucky if you are not obliged to have three), if you intend that there should be a chance of your getting anything, not exactly according to the routine of the day done, if you want it done. The under servant being, as I have said, a sort of fag or slave in the eyes of the upper ones they will *allow* her to make herself useful, though it should not be exactly *her place*.

Mrs. Melwyn had provided, as she thought, in a very ingenious manner for the proper attendance upon Miss Arnold by having recourse to this said under housemaid, and by adding a couple of sovereigns to her wages unknown to Randall, but she had forgotten the carrying up of her trunk. Had the momentous question arisen about a visitor's trunk, the matter would have been easily settled—the onerous task of carrying it between them upstairs would have been discharged, as a matter of course by the two footmen—but this was a new case—an anomaly. Still Mrs. Melwyn cherished a secret hope that the two footmen might be so very nice and kind, as to take upon themselves, as a matter of course, to do it now—therefore she said *them*, hoping somebody would answer to this *them* some way or other, but,—

“Who?” asked Bridget, bringing the matter to a point.

“Why, I am sure I don't exactly know.

Who is there below ? I suppose you could not carry the things up yourself, Bridget ?”

“ I am afraid not, ma’am. There’s only one trunk, and it looks heavy.”

“ Oh !” cried Lettice, “ I can come and help you. We can carry it up together, for Myra and I carried it down together easily.” And she was quitting the room. But Mrs. Melwyn laid her hand upon her shoulder.

“ No, my dear, upon no account—Bridget, fetch up the gardener’s boy, he’ll help you to carry the trunk up.”

Mrs. Melwyn looked excessively annoyed and distressed : Lettice could not imagine what could be the matter.

The gentle, kind lady seemed nervous and embarrassed. At last, evidently making a very great effort with herself, she got out, “ Excuse me, my dear, but there is a little thing . . . I would rather not if you please . . . Servants are so insolent, you know they are ill brought up—If you please, my

dear, it will be better *not* to offer to do things for yourself, which young ladies don't usually undertake to do—such as carrying up trunks. And then, I think, it will be better not to allude to past circumstances before the servants. Servants, you know, my dear—I can't think why it is—but they are so apt to feel a contempt for people that do not happen to be very—very—I mean—rich ; you know—It's excessively strange and wrong in them I am sure ; but so it is with them ; and I think—don't be vexed at my saying it—I think my dear it will make you more . . . You will be more comfortable, I think, if you maintain your own dignity. I hope you will not be hurt at me for giving you this little hint, Miss Arnold."

"Hurt! Oh, madam!" And Lettice could not forbear taking up the beautiful white hand of this most fair and gentle woman, and kissing it with the most respectful reverence. "Whatever you will be so very kind as to

suggest to me I will so carefully attend to—and I shall be so much obliged to you.”

How sweet was this gentle manner to poor Mrs. Melwyn! She began to feel lightened from quite a load of anxiety. She began to believe, that happen what would, she should never be *afraid* of Lettice.

“Catherine was quite right; oh, what a comfort it would be!”

“Well then,” she continued with more cheerfulness, “I will go away and see that your things are sent up to you, for there is no time to be lost.—Bless me! it’s striking seven. You never *can* be ready. Oh, here your trunk comes! I forgot to tell you that Bridget is to answer your bell and wait upon you. I have settled all that—you will find her quite good-natured and attentive. She’s really an obliging girl.”

And so indeed Bridget proved to be in the main.

The upper housemaid took care to preserve

strict discipline, and to exact prompt obedience in her own department, whatever the mistress of the mansion might do in hers.

And Bridget was in excellent order accordingly. The worst of it was, as we shall have occasion to see, that these influences of the upper housemaid were not always exercised on the beneficial side of things, and that Bridget could follow the lead of high personages, in what was wrong, as well as in what was right—for it was much more for Bridget's interest, and much more essential to Bridget's comfort, to be upon good terms with the real,—than to please the ostensible mistress.

“Well, then,” Mrs. Melwyn went on, in a somewhat hurried manner, “I had better leave you and make your excuses to the General, and you will follow me to the dining-room as soon as you can. We must not keep dinner waiting any longer. You will excuse ceremony on my part, I am sure.—The General is

an invalid, you know, and those matters are so important to his health."

And so saying, she glided away, leaving Lettice almost too much astonished to be delighted with all this consideration and kindness—things to which she had been little accustomed. But the impression she received upon the whole was very sweet. The face and manner of Mrs. Melwyn were so excessively soft ; her very dress, the colour of her hair, her step, her voice ; everything spoke so much gentleness. Lettice thought her the loveliest person she had ever met with. More charming even than Catherine—more attaching even than Mrs. Danvers. She felt very much inclined to adore her.

She was but a very few hours longer in the house before pity added to this rising feeling of attachment ; and I believe there is nothing attaches the inferior to the superior like pity.

Dressed in one of her best new dresses, and with her hair done up as neatly as she possibly

could in that hurry, Lettice made her way to the dining-room.

It was a large, lofty, very handsome, and rather awfully *resounding* room, with old family pictures upon every side. There was a sideboard set out, sparkling with glass and plate; a small table in the middle of the apartment with silver covers and dishes shining in the light of four wax candles; a blazing fire, a splendid Indian screen before the door; two footmen in liveries of pink and white, and a gentleman in a black suit, in attendance. The General and Mrs. Melwyn were seated opposite to each other at table.

The soup had been already discussed, and the first course was set upon the table when Miss Arnold entered.

Had she been a young lady *born*—an obsequious footman would have doubtless flown to attend her to her seat, and present her with a chair: as it was, she would have been spared this piece of etiquette, and she

was making her way to her chair without missing the attention, when the General, who observed his saucy footmen standing lounging about, without offering to move forward, frowned in what Lettice thought a most alarming way, and said in a stern voice, and regarding significantly the two footmen, "What are you about?" Upon which the two gentlemen in pink and silver started, and with looks of considerable trepidation, hurried forward, and presented her with a seat; and she placed herself at table with something of the same feelings of alarm and trepidation, though she could not help feeling gratified by this mark of attention, whatever the manner in which it was bestowed might be.

Mrs. Melwyn's face expressed both surprise and satisfaction.

"We thought you would excuse us. The soup has been set aside for you," said the lady of the house, with much politeness of manner.

“ Oh, thank you, Ma’am, I beg your pardon for being late—pray excuse me.”

“ Give Miss Arnold soup.”

Again in a stern, authoritative voice from the General.

Mrs. Melwyn was accustomed to the sternness, but she was most agreeably astonished at the politeness. The General was a man, as it was universally acknowledged, of first-rate manners in general society, and his amenity there formed a strong contrast with some of his ways in his own house. She had not dared to hope, that a young lady standing in the relation of humble companion to herself, would be considered worthy to be classed among those to whom the General’s polite attention was due; but in this she found that she had done him injustice; and she looked quite pleased and grateful for it, and relieved from what had cost her kind heart much anxiety. She looked more at ease—lost her nervous hurried look—and appeared, what it

was a sad pity that she was not always mistress enough of her own spirits to appear—a very lady-like, charming person.

Lettice, as I said, was upon her side glad to find herself treated with polite attention, though the stern countenance, and a something high and authoritative in the General's voice and manner, prevented her feeling at ease, or taking much pleasure in anything.

She was not called upon to feel grateful either. All this was not done out of the least consideration for her or her feelings.

The General, who, Randall perhaps excepted, made a point of keeping every one of his servants, as far as he, at least, was concerned, in a state of the utmost subservience, did not choose that any one who had the honour of a seat at his table, should be neglected by those "rascals," as he usually styled his footmen.

It being the first evening after Miss Arnold's arrival, Mrs. Melwyn had too much feeling for her, and too much natural politeness, to call upon her to enter upon those after-dinner and evening duties of reading aloud, and playing backgammon with the General, for the performance of which Catherine had expressly stipulated. Not with Lettice alone, but what was of far more importance, and a far more difficult negotiation to manage — with the General himself.

She had made her father promise that he would suffer this young lady to undertake the place of reader—a place which Catherine herself had now filled for some time, to the inexpressible relief of her mother—and she had also brought him to consent to the proposal that Miss Arnold should be permitted to try whether she could play well enough at backgammon to make an adversary worth the trouble of vanquishing.

He had grumbled and objected—as it was a

matter of course with him to grumble and object in the first instance to everything—to this arrangement, but had finally consented. However, he was not particularly impatient to begin; and besides, he was habitually a well-bred man, so that any duty which came under his category of good manners he punctually performed. People are too apt, I think, to misprize this sort of politeness of habit—of mere conventual habit, if you will—as a quality of small comparative value. Doubtless there are qualities with which it cannot enter into comparison; yet, taken by itself, and above all, as a necessary substitute for higher principles of action, when such unfortunately may be wanting, it is a very good thing as far as it goes.

And even in other cases, where these higher and better principles are not wanting, it is not without its value, and a very considerable value too. Politeness is a charming thing in itself; and when exercised in the domestic

relations, smooths and sweetens the current of life to an incalculable degree.

It enhances the value of a really gentle and kind temper; it softens down the asperities of a harsh and rugged one;—and, to an extent, of which many worthy people,—who mistake politeness for insincerity, and think a blunt roughness of demeanour a warrant for the honesty and truth of their affections—seem to be little aware. Where there was so little kindness of nature, and so much of selfishness and ill-tempered indulgence, as in this cross old man before us, observe that his habits of politeness were not entirely without avail. They kept him in a certain check, and certainly rendered him more tolerable. He was not quite such a brute bear as he would have been, left to his uncorrected nature.

Politeness is, and ought to be, a habit so confirmed, that we exercise it instinctively—without consideration, without attention, without effort, as it were. This is the very essence

of the sort of politeness I am thinking of. By thus making it matter of habit, it may, perhaps, take it out of the category of the virtues, but it places it in that of the qualities; and, in some matters, good qualities are almost as valuable—almost more valuable—than even if they still held their place among what might be strictly called the virtues—and this of politeness, in my opinion, is one.

By virtues, I mean acts which are performed with a certain difficulty, under the sense of responsibility to duty, under the self-discipline of right principle—by qualities, I mean what is spontaneous. Constitutional good qualities are spontaneous: such as natural sweetness of temper—natural delicacy of feeling—natural intrepidity. Others are the result of habit, and end by being spontaneous—by being a second nature, as habits are justly called. Gentleness of tone and manner—attention to conventional proprieties—to people's little wants and feelings—are among these. This same

politeness being a sort of summary of such.

I will end this little didactic digression by advising all those who have the rearing of the young committed to their hands, so carefully to form them in matters of this description, that they shall attain *habits*—that the delicacy of their perceptions, the gentleness of their tones and gestures, the propriety of their dress, the politeness of their manners, shall become spontaneous acts, done without reference to self—matters of course. By which means, not only much that is disagreeable to others is avoided, and much that is amiable attained, but a great deal of reference to self is in after life escaped; and temptations to the faults of vanity—pride—envious comparisons with our neighbours, and the feebleness of self-distrust very considerably diminished.

And so, to return, the politeness of the General and Mrs. Melwyn led to this result, the leaving Miss Arnold undisturbed to make

her reflections and her observations, before commencing the tasks which Mrs. Melwyn, for the last time, undertook for her, namely, those of reading the newspaper and playing the hit.

Lettice could not help feeling rejoiced to be spared this sort of public exhibition of her powers, till she was in a slight degree better acquainted with her ground; and she was glad to know, without being directly told, what it was customary to do in these respects. But in every other point of view, she had better, perhaps, have been reader than listener. For, if she gained a lesson as to the routine to be followed, she paid for it by receiving at the same time, a considerably alarming impression of the General's ways of proceeding.

"Shall I read the newspaper to you, this evening, General?" began Mrs. Melwyn, timidly.

"I don't care if you do," roughly.

Polite men, be it observed, *en passant*, do not at all think it a necessary consequence of

their possessing that amiable quality, that it should be exercised for the benefit of their wives. Wives, you know, are things apart—things strictly a man's own—apart from the category of general society—and not at all necessarily the object of such nice considerations and proprieties. Some generous natures no doubt there are, whom the very consideration of having a woman in their power leads to the nicest attention in matters of this delicate nature. Happy woman that falls into such hands! Such had not, certainly, been poor Mrs. Melwyn's fate.

To be rude and abrupt in his behaviour to her, the General, it is plain, did not think the slightest impeachment of his gentlemanlike manners.

“Shall I read the newspaper, this evening?”

“Is there anything worth reading in it?” asked he, in a sneering, disagreeable manner, not meant for her though. In this instance—aimed, perhaps, at the newspaper—but

giving an unpleasant feeling to all present.

“ I am sure I don’t know,” in a timid voice, “ what you will call worth reading. Shall I begin with the leading article ? ”

“ What is the leading article all about ? ”

“ I am sure I can’t say.”

“ Can’t you look ? ”

“ The sugar question, I think.”

“ Well, what has the fool to say about that ? ”

“ ‘ The speech of Lord **** last night upon the much-discussed subject of the sugar question, has no doubt been read and commented upon, in their various ways, and according to their different impressions—shall we say prejudices ?—by our readers. The performance, it is upon all hands agreed, was masterly, and, as far as eloquence is concerned, no one we should imagine, can dispute that the accomplished statesman who uttered this remarkable speech did only justice to ’ ”

“Well—well—well—*well*,” in a sneering tone—“I really do wonder how long you could go on droning and dinning, and dinning and droning such palpably empty editorial nonsense as that into a man’s ears.—Now I would be glad to ask you—merely to ask you, as a rational woman, Mrs. Melwyn—what possible amusement or profit can be drawn from a long exordium which says absolutely nothing—tells one absolutely nothing but what every one knew before—stuff with which all editors of newspapers seem to think it necessary to preface their remarks. What in the name of —— is the use of wasting your breath and my patience in retailing such mere verbiage as that—can’t you skip?—Did it never enter into your head to skip?—Are you a mere reading-machine, madam?”

“Shall I pass on to the next subject?”

“No, that’s not my meaning—if you could take a meaning.—What I want is only what every rational person expects when these con-

founded lucubrations of a stupid newspaper editor are read up—that the reader will have the sense to leave all these useless phrases and useless syllables out, and give the pith and marrow of the matter to the listener.—Well—well, never mind—if you can't, you can't: get on at all events.”

Mrs. Melwyn coloured faintly, looked nervous and uneasy,—glanced down the columns of the newspaper, and hesitated.

“ Well,—can't you go on? Will you be pleased or will you not to get on?—What's the use of your sitting there with that absurd, bamboozled face of your's—looking for all the world like a child of six years old, who's afraid to be whipped. Haven't I said so.—If you can't, you can't. If you haven't the sense, you have'nt. If it's not in you—it's not in you; but for ——'s sake get on.”

“ ‘Mr. **** rose, and in a manner upon which we cannot, we are sorry to say, exactly bestow our unqualified approbation, but which

nevertheless, to us we must confess in a rather unaccountable manner, seemed to claim and to command the ear and the attention of a very crowded house, &c., &c., &c.’”

“There you are again! Why the deuce can’t you pass over all that rigmarole, and tell us what the confounded blockheads on that side did really say?”

“I read this debate to you yesterday, you know. These are only the editor’s remarks upon it. Shall I give you the summary of last night’s debate?”

“No, let’s hear what that fool of an editor really has to say upon this cursed sugar question. He’s against the measure, that’s one comfort.”

“He does not seem to be so exactly,” glancing down the page.

“I’ll take the liberty of judging of that matter for myself, Mrs. Melwyn, if you’ll only be so particularly obliging as to read on.”

Which she did. Now reproached for reading in such a low clattering manner, with that d——d soft voice of hers, that it was impossible to hear ; and when she raised it, asked, “What the deuce was the use of shouting so as to be heard by all the fellows in the servants’ hall ?”

In this style, the newspaper was at last, for better, for worse, blundered through, in the most uncomfortable manner possible, by the terrified reader.

Lettice sat by, deeply attentive. She was a brave, high-spirited girl, and she did not feel dismayed ; her predominant sentiment was self-congratulation that she should be able to spare that sweet, soft, kind Mrs. Melwyn the ungrateful task.

She sat observing, and laying down her own plans of proceeding. It was not the first time in her life that she had been exposed to what is called scolding ; a thing every day, I verily believe,—and am most happy to do so—going

more and more out of fashion, though still retained, as a *habit*, by many people otherwise well-meaning enough. It was retained in its full vigour by the General, who was not well-meaning at all; he usually meaning nothing on earth by what he did, but the indulgence of the present humour, good, bad, or indifferent. Lettice had lived in a sphere of life where this sort of domestic violence used to be very common; and she had learned to bear it, even from the lips of those she loved, with patience. She knew this very well, and she thought to herself, "if I could get into the habit of hardly caring for it from those very near and dear to me, surely it will be easy enough to meet it with indifference from a poor, cross, peevish, suffering old man, whom I don't care for in the least. The way must be, to get into the habit of it from the first, to let the words

‘Pass by me as the idle wind which I regard not.’

I must put all my vanity, all my spirit, all my

own little tempers, quietly out of the way, and never trouble myself with what he says, but go reading on in the best way I can, to please him, but with the most unruffled outward appearance of tranquillity; and the utmost secret indifference as to whether I succeed or not. He shall be sooner tired of scolding, than I of looking as if I never heard it. He'll give over if I can persevere, instead of looking all colours and all ways, as that dear, gentle Mrs. Melwyn does."

The trial at backgammon was, if such a thing could be, even worse than the reading aloud. It seemed as if it was impossible to give satisfaction here.

The General not only played his own game, but insisted upon playing that of his adversary too; and was by turns angry at her stupidity in missing an advantage through want of skill, asking "what could be the possible interest or pleasure of playing with such a mere child?" and vexed, if the plan he pointed out ended in

his own discomfiture,—for he could not bear to lose.

Backgammon, too, was an unlucky game to be played with one of a temper such as his. Every favourable throw of the dice, it is true, filled him with a disagreeable sarcastic exultation; but a positively bad one, and still more, a succession of bad ones, drove him furious. After a long course of provoking throws, such as sometimes will happen, he would seem half mad, storm, curse, and swear, in the most ridiculous, if it had not been blasphemous, manner; and sometimes end the furious outburst by banging the tables together, and vowing he would never play at this confounded game again as long as he lived.

There was an exhibition of this sort that very evening. Mrs. Melwyn looked much distressed, and almost ashamed, as she glanced at Lettice to see how she took it; but Lettice appeared to be too much engaged with a knot in her netting to seem to take it at all, which

evidently relieved Mrs. Melwyn. The scene had not, however, been lost upon our friend, who had observed it with a smile of secret contempt; mentally, however, congratulating herself upon her good, robust nerves. Such exhibitions of violence being, as she was well aware, really terrible trials of strength to those cursed with physical delicacy and susceptibility in this respect.

The very highest endeavours at fortitude and courage, the most strenuous exertions to maintain at least apparent tranquillity, the most generous intentions, and the most charitable interpretations of ebullitions of a hasty and ill-governed temper such as this, would be, she knew, without avail, where the fluttering heart and trembling spirits vibrated to every violent word.

The worst of it is, that such sufferers, instead of finding their nerves hardened and their powers of endurance strengthened by the habitual repetition of such successive acts of

intemperate passion, too often find themselves weakened by every fresh call upon a strength unequal to the trial ; and, to their dismay and despair discover, that every new outburst, whilst it strengthens the evil habit upon the part of the aggressor, takes something from the sufferer's own power of meeting it even tolerably.

Again Lettice looked with a feeling of compassionate interest at Mrs. Melwyn, and again, every time she looked, she rejoiced more and more in the idea of being the means of saving her from what she perceived was, indeed, to such a frame and temper as hers, a source of very great suffering. She resolved to keep up her own spirits manfully, and oppose the only true defence to so much unreasonableness and ill-temper, courage and indifference. She felt sure, if she could only, by a little effort, maintain her spirits for a short time, that her perseverance would terminate in establishing a habit of passive tranquillity,

which once done, the old man's violence would cost her little or nothing more.

The General, though polite to Lettice in their first communications, held her in far too little esteem to care one doit what he did or said before her. He was an excessively proud man; and the idea that a girl, so greatly his inferior in every way, should keep him in check, or venture even to make a remark upon his behaviour, far less presume to judge his conduct, never entered into his head. I wonder what he would have felt, if he could have been made aware of that secret smile.

But time had run on, and the evening, which had seemed endless, at last drew to a close. How did the heart of Lettice expand, as if relieved from a heavy weight; when at last the door opened, and giving signal that the weary hours were at last ended, a footman bearing a tray with wine, spirits, water, &c., entered the room.

The General took his accustomed glass of whisky and water, and then, opening his cigar-box, he began to smoke. This process invariably made Mrs. Melwyn feel rather sick, but she was usually obliged to submit to it in the best manner she could, as the General liked to have her sitting by him, whilst he whiffed the smoke away, never perhaps uttering one single word, even between each cigar.

This evening, however, it being somewhat later than usual, she ventured to rise and make a motion to retire,—but, being asked in a rough manner, what she was running away for, she immediately returned and resumed her seat; and there she sat, saying nothing, either to the General or to Miss Arnold, all three preserving the most solemn silence, till three cigars had been successively discussed. The drawing-room began to smell abominably of that detestable tobacco, and Mrs. Melwyn, as usual, began to feel rather ill, and to turn pale. At last the French clock on the chimney-piece

rang one quarter to eleven, and then, as the General loved not late hours, he looked at his watch, wound it up, said he supposed it was time to think of moving, and the two ladies were at last suffered to take their departure.

The servant entered with lighted candles. Mrs. Melwyn took one, bade him give Miss Arnold another; and they went up-stairs together.

“Good night, my dear,” said the lady of the house, with a wearied, worn-out air, and a tone in which there was a good deal of sadness.

She could not get used to these evenings, poor thing! Every time the General was cross, she felt it just as acutely as if it had been the first; and his temper had lately grown much worse. He had been dreadfully cross since Catherine married.

Mrs. Melwyn had lately hardly known what to do with him, or how to contrive to bear it.

“Good night, my dear,” she said, with such a depressed tone and manner that Lettice’s

heart quite bled for her; "I hope you will sleep comfortably."

"Can I be of any further use to you, madam, to night?" she said, so kindly, softly, and gently, that Mrs. Melwyn felt soothed and solaced, almost as if it had been her own darling Catherine who spoke. She quite longed to have Miss Arnold attend upon her and put her to bed, as Catherine would insist upon doing at times when her mother was more than usually out of spirits.

But this was a self-assertion not to be thought of. It would be an encroachment upon Randall's privileges not to be endured by that worthy. Catherine might venture upon it,—Catherine was all-powerful,—and Catherine would as well as could,—but she—poor defenceless Mrs. Melwyn, she dared not,—for her life she dared not—so she said—

"Oh no, thank you; don't come into my dressing-room,—Randall is very particular: she considers *that* her own territory. She

does not like any one to come in, especially at night; but just let me look whether your fire burns," she added, entering Lettice's room, for she longed to stay with her a little longer, and for a little longer this indulgence she might venture upon, besides, she wanted to speak a few words.

The fire was blazing merrily; Mrs. Melwyn put her candle down upon the chimney-piece, and stood there a little while before it, looking again irresolute. It seemed as if she wished, and did not know how, to say something. Lettice stood at a short distance, respectfully expectant.

"I declare it's very cold to-night," with a little shiver.

"I did not feel it cold, but then this is so thoroughly comfortable a house."

"Do you think so? Shall you find it so? The wind comes sharply down the passages, sometimes, but I wish,—I hope you won't care much for that—or—or—or—any little painful

things; they can't be helped, you know, in this world."

"Ah madam! if I may venture to say so, there is one good thing one gets out of great hardships,—little things do seem so *very* little afterwards."

"Ay, if they are really little, but——"

"Things that are——that don't seem little to people of more gentle nurture, who have lived in a different way—seem, and are, little to those who have roughed it till they are themselves roughened. That was what I intended to say. One is so very happy to escape dreadful, real, positive distress, that all the rest is like mere play."

Mrs. Melwyn looked at her in a pensive, anxious, inquiring manner. She wanted to see if she was understood; she saw that she was. She saw something truly heartening and encouraging in the young girl's countenance. She shook hands with her and bade her good night very affectionately, and went

to her own dressing-room. Randall was as cross that night as it was possible for the most tyrannical servant to be, but some way or other, Mrs. Melwyn did not feel as if she cared for it *quite* so much as usual; she had her mind filled with the image of Lettice. Something so very nice about her, she thought to herself,—in one respect even better than Catherine. She should not be so afraid of her being distressed by disagreeable things. She should venture to tell her about Randall, and other vexations which she had carefully concealed from Catherine, lest they should make her unhappy. For thus she represented to herself the extreme reserve she had endeavoured to practise with respect to Randall as regarded Catherine,—so that, in fact, Catherine, great as her suspicions upon the subject were, was far from surmising the full extent of the evil.

Mrs. Melwyn, as we see, said to herself, that this reserve on her part arose from her fear of distressing Catherine,—but the truth

was, that she dreaded that if her daughter knew all, she would make an absolute point of Randall being parted with, and this, as happens to many weak spirits, thus unaccountably enthralled, seemed to her the most terrible of all alternatives.

Randall kept the keys,—Randall managed the household,—Randall looked after the household linen,—Randall provided her mistress's dress,—Randall did a hundred things every day which she was too languid to do herself, and how could she trust a stranger to do them for her? And could she bear a stranger about her? And then, there was the General!

Randall dressed the General's arm,—Randall pleased him, he liked her, though he swore at her,—he could bear her about his person,—he never would bear any one else.

The effort of a change like this was too great to be attempted,—any passive endurance of present evils is to feeble spirits more tolerable than the heroic effort to shake them off.

Most people prefer bearing the pain of toothache to submitting to the operation of its extraction.

The courageous effort to bear present pain for the sake of future ease is beyond them.

And then with such an imagination as poor Mrs. Melwyn's. The true imagination of the coward,—that which makes a man die many times before his death,—peoples the uncertain future with such monsters and dragons,—such wind-mills turned into giants, that they have not even hope to hearten and encourage them. The very presence of the present evil crows and debilitates them against the daring to meet an uncertain future.

The very possession of the tyrannical, bad servant terrifies them from risking the change for another.

Another, their coward hearts tell them, may be only ten times worse. So Mrs. Melwyn, as we see, had not enjoyed the comfort of complaining of Randall to her own Catherine, for

fear of consequences; but no such consequences were to be apprehended in the case of Miss Arnold.

She should be able to complain of Randall, without feeling that she would be urged to conquer her weakness, and part with her. There was something inexpressibly comfortable in this idea; so Randall pouted away in vain, and Mrs. Melwyn looked and felt as if she heeded it not so very much,—not nearly so much as usual; but when Randall perceived this, she was excessively offended, and more and more cross and disagreeable. For she was quickness itself, and the unusual tranquillity of Mrs. Melwyn's manner under all her marks and intimations of high dissatisfaction and displeasure, was doubtless somewhat ominous and alarming.

There was a new-comer, and a new-comer who would be thrown into very close relations with Mrs. Melwyn and the General; and she did not see how, do what she could, unless she

could succeed in getting her out of the house, these close relations could possibly be helped.

Her despotism (she called it influence) was in danger of being very much weakened, by its being thus divided; and she saw, even now, as she fancied, some of the effects she deprecated. Mrs. Melwyn, certainly, did not look half so fidgetted, nervous, and uncomfortable this evening, as she usually did when Randall thought proper to show herself vexed.

You may imagine how this discovery sweetened her temper, and how she flounced about, looking as displeased as she possibly could; and what short answers she gave when Mrs. Melwyn ventured to address her; and how she pulled the comb through her tender lady's hair, and when Mrs. Melwyn gently ventured to complain of her roughness, how she denied she was the least rough, and asserted that she was combing it exactly as she always did, only she did not know what was come to some people of late, there was no pleasing them, do

what one would. And how Mrs. Melwyn, after this check, submitted in her usual uncomplaining manner, to have her hair treated as Randall thought good; and how Randall stood there, gathering fresh courage from the conviction that, let matters be as they would, her mistress would not dare to disoblige her; and how her own resolutions strengthened as things went on, till they amounted to something approaching to open defiance and a resolution not to allow herself to soften, or be one whit more obliging—not to enter the lists against the new-comer in this new and amiable way, but to encounter her in her own style. Oh, no! anything but this! She would not stoop to such degradation as this! No; she would meet the creature and her mistress with open defiance, and bear them both down, if need were, by main force.

CHAPTER VI.

Cowards die many times before their death.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE courage of Lettice, as I have told you, was strong, and her nerves good, but in spite of this, assisted by the best resolutions in the world, she *did* find it a hard matter to stand the General. She was very hopeful the first day or two,—the habitual politeness of which I have spoken, came in aid. It exercised a sort of instinctive and involuntary check upon the old man's rude intemperance of language

when irritated. Lettice did her very best to read the newspaper to his satisfaction; skipping every unnecessary word, just as Catherine had been accustomed to do, without hurting the sense in the least; and getting over the ground with all the rapidity the old veteran desired. This was a plan poor Mrs. Melwyn was far too nervous to adopt. If she missed a word it was sure to be the wrong one to miss,—one necessary to, instead of encumbering the meaning. It was quite indispensable that she should read simply and straightforwardly what was put before her, or she was certain to get into confusion, and have herself scolded. Even the dreaded and dreadful backgammon did tolerably well, whilst the General's politeness to the stranger lasted. Lettice was surprised herself, to find how easily the task, which had appeared so awful, was discharged; but she had not long to congratulate herself. Gradually,—at first by slow degrees, but afterwards like the accelerated descent of a

stone down the hill, acquired habit gave way to constitutional ill-humour. Alas, they tell us nature expelled with a pitchfork will make her way back again; most true of the unregenerated nature—most true of the poor blind heathen—or the poor untutored christian, to all intents and purposes a heathen—too true even of those assisted by better considerations, higher principles, and higher aids.

First it was a little low grumbling; then a few impatient gestures; then a few impatient words—words became sentences;—sentences of invective—soon it was with her, just as it had been with others. This graduated progression assisted, however, gradually to harden and prepare her. She was resolved not to look frightened, though her very knees would knock together at times. She was determined never to allow herself to feel provoked, or hurt, or ill-used, let the General be ever so rude: and to soften her heart by any such ideas she never allowed

herself. Steadily she kept in mind that he was a suffering, ill-disciplined, irritable old man ; and by keeping these considerations in view, she actually achieved the most difficult, —almost heroic effort. She managed to attain a frame of mind in which she could pity his sufferings, feel indulgence for his faults, and remain quite placid under their effects as regarded herself.

This conduct, before a very long time had elapsed, produced an effect far more agreeable than she had ever ventured to anticipate.

The General began to like her.

Like many other cross people, he was excessively difficult to be pleased in one article—the way people took his scoldings.—He was offended if they were received with cheerfulness—in the way Edgar had tried to laugh them off—he was still more vexed if people seemed hurt or suffering under them : if they cried, it was bad indeed.—Like many others not absolutely wicked and cruel, though he

could not control his temper, he really did feel vexed at seeing the pain he had produced. His conscience would cry out a little at such times. Now, nothing made him so uncomfortable and irritable, as having a quarrel with his conscience ; a thing that did not very often happen, to be sure—the said conscience being in his case not a very watchful guardian, but it was all the more disagreeable when it spoke. The genuine good temper and habitual self-possession—the calmness without disrespect—the cheerfulness without carelessness—the respectful attention, stripped of all meanness and subservience, which Lettice managed to preserve in her relations with him,—at last made its way quite to his heart,—that is to say to his taste or fancy, for I don't think he had much of a heart. He began to grow quite fond of her, and one day delighted, as much as he surprised Mrs. Melwyn, by saying,—that Miss Arnold really was a very pretty sort of young woman, and he thought suited them very well.

And so the grand difficulty of managing with the General's faults was got over, but there remained Mrs. Melwyn's and the servants'.

Lettice had never laid her account at finding any faults in Mrs. Melwyn. That lady, from the first moment she beheld her, had quite won her heart. Her elegance of appearance, the dove-like softness of her countenance, the gentle sweetness of her voice, all conspired to make the most charming impression. Could there lie anything under that sweet outside, but the gentlest and most indulgent of tempers?

No, she was right there, nothing could be more gentle, more indulgent than was Mrs. Melwyn's temper; and Lettice had seen so much of the rough, the harsh, the captious, and the unamiable during her life, that grant her the existence of those two qualities, and she could scarcely desire anything more. She had yet to learn what are the evils which attend the timid and the weak.

She had yet to know that there may be much

concealed self-indulgence, where there is a most yielding disposition; and that they who are too cowardly to resist wrong and violence courageously, from a weak and culpable indulgence of their own shyness and timidity, will afford a poor defence to those they ought to protect, and expose them to innumerable evils.

Lettice had managed to become easy with the General; she could have been perfectly happy with Mrs. Melwyn, but nothing could get over the difficulties with the servants. Conscious of the misrule they exercised; jealous of the new-comer—who soon showed herself to be a clever and spirited girl—a sort of league was immediately instituted among them; its declared object being either to break her spirit, or get rid of her out of the house. The persecutions she endured; the daily minute troubles and vexations; the difficulties cast in her path by these dangerous yet contemptible foes, it would be endless to describe.

Whatever she wanted she could not get done.

Even Bridget, under the influence of the upper housemaid, proved a broken reed to lean upon. Her fire would never be lighted ; nor her room done at the proper time ; and when she came down with red hands, purple cheeks, and, worst of all, a red nose, looking, this cold spring, the very picture of chill and misery, the General would look cross, and Mrs. Melwyn not pleased, and would wonder “How she could get so starved, and why she did not make them light her fire.”

She could make no reply but that she would ask Bridget to be more punctual.

It was worse, when do what she would—ring as she would—nobody would come to fasten her dress for dinner till the last bell was sounding ; and when it was impossible for her to pay all those nice attentions to her appearance which the General’s critical eye demanded. Though he said nothing, he would upon such occasions look as if he thought her a sloven ; and Mrs. Melwyn, on her side, seemed excessively fretted

and uneasy, that her favourite would do herself so little justice, and run the risk of forfeiting the General's favour; and this last piece of injustice, Lettice did feel it hard to bear.

It was the same in all the other minutiae of domestic life. Every trifling circumstance, like a midge's sting, though insignificant in itself, was rendered in the sum total most troublesome.

If they were going out walking, Miss Arnold's shoes were never cleaned. She provided herself with several pairs, that one at least might always be ready, and she not keep the General and Mrs. Melwyn waiting. It was of no use. The shoes were never ready. If there were several pairs, they were lost, or odd shoes brought up.

She did not care for labour. She had no foolish pride about serving herself, she had been used to that sort of thing; she had not the slightest wish on earth to be a fine lady; but that was forbidden. It was one of the things

Mrs. Melwyn had made a point of, and continued to make a point of; but then, why did she not take care she should be better served?

She, the mistress in her own house! Was it indifference to her guest's comforts? No, her unremitting personal kindness forbade that idea. What was it then, that left her helpless guest thus exposed to want and insult? Yes, *want!* I may use the word; for in her new sphere of action, the things she required were absolute necessities. The want in its way was as great as she had ever known. Yes, insult,—for every little negligence was felt as an insult,—Lettice knew too well that as an insult it was intended. What made this kind Mrs. Melwyn permit such things? Weakness, nothing but weakness,—culpable weakness,—horror of that which would give her feeble spirit pain.

Lettice found it extremely difficult to be candid in this instance. She who had never experienced what this weakness of the spirit

was, found it almost impossible to be indulgent to it. She felt quite vexed and sore. But when she looked so, poor Mrs. Melwyn would put on such a sad, anxious, weary face, that it was almost impossible not to feel concerned for her, and to forgive her at once. And so this good, generous, kind-hearted being's temper achieved another victory. She was able to love Mrs. Melwyn in spite of all her weakness, and the evils she in consequence suffered; and this indulgent affection made everything easy.

There were times, however, when she found it almost too difficult to get on; but upon one occasion after another occurring of this nature, and still more when she discovered that Mrs. Melwyn was a yet greater sufferer from this servile tyranny than herself, she at last determined to speak out, and see whether things could not be established upon a more reasonable and proper footing.

There was one day a terrible quarrel with Randall. It happened that Randall was from

home, drinking tea with a friend. She had either bound up the General's ailing arm too tight, or the arm had swelled; however, for some reason or other, the injured part became extremely painful. The General fidgetted and swore, but bore it for some time with the sort of resolute determination with which, to do him justice, he was accustomed to meet pain. At last the aching became so intolerable that it was scarcely to be endured; and after ringing twenty times to inquire whether Randall was come home, and uttering a heavy imprecation each time he was answered in the negative; what between pain and impatience he became so fevered that he really seemed quite ill, and his sufferings were evidently more than he could well endure. Poor Mrs. Melwyn, helpless and feeble, dared not propose to do anything for him, though she suffered,—soft, kind creature that she was,—almost more in witnessing his distress than he did in the midst of it. At last Lettice ventured to say,

that she thought it a great pity the General should continue to suffer this agony, which she felt assured must be positively dangerous,—and modestly ventured to suggest that she should be allowed to undo the bandage and relieve the pressure.

“Dear me,” said Mrs. Melwyn, in a hurried, frightened way, “could you venture? Suppose you should do mischief;—better wait, perhaps.”

“Easily said, ma’am,” cried the General. “It’s not *your* arm that’s aching as if it would drop from your body, that’s plain. What’s that you are saying, Miss Arnold?”

“If you could trust me to do it, I was saying;—if you would give me leave,—I would undo the bandage and endeavour to make it more comfortable. I am afraid that this pain and tight binding may bring on positive inflammation. I really should not be afraid to try; I have seen Mrs. Randall do it hundreds of times. There is no difficulty in it.”

“Dear Lettice, how you talk!” said Mrs. Melwyn, as if she were afraid Randall was behind the door. “No difficulty! How could Randall bear to hear you say so?”

“I don’t know, ma’am; perhaps she would contradict me.—But I think at all events there is no difficulty that I could not manage.”

“Well, then, for Heaven’s sake, try, child!” cried the General, “for really the pain is as if all the dogs in Hockley were gnawing at it. Come along; do something for the love of——”

He suffered Lettice to help him off with his coat, and to undo the bandage, which she accomplished very handily; and then observed that Mrs. Randall, in her haste to depart upon her visit, had bound up the wound in a most careless manner; and the irritation had already produced so serious an inflammation, that she was quite alarmed, and suggested that the doctor should be sent for.

The General swore at the idea of the doctor

and yet more violently at that old hag Randall's confounded carelessness. Mrs. Melwyn looked miserable; she saw the case was bad, and yet she knew that to send for the doctor, and take it out of Randall's hands, would be an insult never to be forgiven.

But Lettice was steady. She was not quite ignorant in these matters, and she felt it her duty to be firm. She expostulated and remonstrated, and was just carrying her point when Mrs. Randall came home; and, having heard below how things were going on, hurried, uncalled for, into the dining-room.

She came in in a mighty pucker, as she would herself have called it, and began asking who had dared to open the wound and expose it to the air: and, seeing Miss Arnold preparing to apply a bread-and-water poultice, which she had made, fell into such a passion of rage and jealousy that she forgot herself so far as to snatch it from Lettice's hands,—vowing, if anybody was to be allowed to

meddle with *her* arm, she would never touch it again so long as she lived.

Mrs. Melwyn turned pale, and began in her softest way :—

“Now really, Randall.—Don’t be angry, Randall.—Do listen, Randall.—The bandage was too tight; I assure you it was. We should not have thought of touching it else.”

“What the devil, Randall, are you about to do now?” cried the General, as she took possession of the arm, in no gentle fashion.

“Bind it up again, to be sure, and keep the air out of it.”

“But you hurt me confoundedly. Ah!—it’s more than I can bear.—Don’t touch it—It’s as if it were on fire!”

“But it must be bound up, I say,” going on, without the least regard to the torture she was evidently putting him to.

But Lettice interfered:—

“Indeed, Mrs. Randall,” she said, “I do not think that you seem to be aware of the

state of inflammation that the arm is in. I assure you, you had better apply the bread-and-water poultice, and send for Mr. Lysons."

"You assure *me*.—Much you know about the matter, I should fancy."

"I think I know this much.—Dear Mrs. Melwyn!—Dear General!—It is more serious than you think. Pray let me write for Mr. Lysons!"

"I do believe she 's right, Randall, for the infernal torture you put me to is more than I can bear. Ach!—Let it go, will you?—Undo it! Undo it!"

But Mrs. Randall, unrelentingly, bound on.

"Have done, I say! Undo it! Will nobody undo it? Lettice Arnold, for heaven's sake!" His face was bathed with the sweat of agony.

Randall persisted; Mrs. Melwyn stood pale, helpless, and aghast; but Lettice hastened forward, scissors in hand, cut the bandage, and liberated the tortured arm in a minute.

Mrs. Randall was in an awful rage. She forgot herself entirely; she had often forgotten herself before; but there was something in this, being done in the presence of a third person, of one so right-minded and spirited as Lettice, which made both the General and his wife view it in a new light. A sort of veil seemed to fall from before their eyes; and for the first time, they both seemed—and simultaneously—aware of the impropriety and degradation of submitting to it.

“Randall! Randall!” remonstrated Mrs. Melwyn—still very gently, however; but it was a great step to remonstrate at all—but Randall was abusing Lettice most violently, and her master and mistress into the bargain, for being governed by such as *her*! “Randall! Randall! Don’t—you forget yourself!”

But the General, who had been silent a second or two, at last broke forth, and roared:

“Have done with your infernal noise! won’t you, you beldam! Here, Lettice, give me the

poultice; put it on, and then write for Lysons, will you?"

In matters such as this, the first step is everything. Mrs. Melwyn and her fiery partner had both been passive as a poor bewitched hen, we are told, is with a straw over her neck. Once shift her position and the incubus is gone.

The arrival of Mr. Lysons completed the victory. Mortification was upon the eve of setting in. The relief from the bandage, and the emollient poultice applied by Lettice, had in all probability saved the General's life.

Little Mrs. Randall cared for this demonstration of her mistaken treatment; she had been too long accustomed to triumph, to yield the field undisputed to a rival. She took refuge in sulky silence, and, when Mr. Lysons was gone, desired to speak with Mrs. Melwyn.

The usual harangue was made. "As she could no longer give satisfaction—would Mrs. Melwyn please to provide herself in a month."

The blood ran cold to Mrs. Melwyn's heart. What! Randall! Impossible! What should she do? What would the General do? What would become of the servants? Who would look after them? What could be done without the faithful Randall?

"Oh, Randall! you don't think of leaving me," she began.

I am not going to repeat the dialogue, which was much the same as that which usually ensues when the mistress entreats the maid to stay, thus putting herself in an irremediably false position. The result of such entreaties was the usual one. Randall, assured of victory, took the matter with a high hand, and, most luckily for all parties, refused to be mollified.

Then poor Mrs. Melwyn, in dismay and despair, returned to the drawing-room. She looked quite ill; she dared not tell the General what had happened—positively dared not.—She resolved to make one other appeal to Randall first; to bribe her, as she had often

done before, to bribe high—higher than ever. —Anything, rather than part with her.

But she was so nervous, so restless, so miserable, that Lettice observed it with much compassion, and came and sat by her, which was her way of comforting her friend when she saw she wanted comfort. Mrs. Melwyn took her hand, and held it between both hers, and looked as if she greatly wanted comfort indeed.

The General, soon after this, rose to go to bed. It was earlier than his usual hour, for he was quite worn out with what he had suffered.

So he left the two ladies sitting over the fire, and then Mrs. Melwyn at last opened her heart, and disclosed to her friend the dismal tidings—the cause of her present misery—and related in detail the dreadful occurrence of Randall's resignation.

It was time, Lettice thought, to speak out and she determined to venture upon it. She

had long anxiously desired to emancipate the woman she loved with all the intensity of a child, from the fearful yoke under which she suffered : to dissolve the pernicious enchantment which surrounded her. She spoke, and she did so with so much gentleness, reason, firmness, good-nature, that Mrs. Melwyn yielded to the blessed influence. In short, it was that night determined that Randall's resignation, so far as Mrs. Melwyn was concerned, should be accepted. If that potentate chose to communicate her resolution herself to the General, it was well, and he must decide ; otherwise Lettice would take upon herself to do this, and, unless he opposed the measure, Randall should go.

With little difficulty Lettice persuaded Mrs. Melwyn not to ring for Randall that night ; saying that now she had resigned her position, her mistress had better allow herself to be put to bed by her friend. This was not a difficult task. That she should not meet Randall

again was what Mrs. Melwyn in her terror as much desired as Lettice did in her prudence. In short, the General, under the influence of Lettice's representations—she was beginning to gain great influence with him—consented to part with the maid; and Lettice had the inconceivable satisfaction of herself carrying to that personage her wages, and a handsome gratuity, and of seeing her that very morning quit the house, which was done with abundance of tears, and bitter lamentations over the ingratitude of mankind.

How the house felt after she was gone, those who have been visited with a domestic plague of this nature will understand. To those who have not, so great a result from so apparently insignificant a cause would be utterly unimaginable.

“And so they lived very happy ever afterwards.”

Well—don't stare—they really *did*.

A good genius was substituted for an evil

one. Under her benign influence it is astonishing how smoothly and merrily things went on. The General was so comfortable that he very often forgot to be cross; Mrs. Melwyn, content with everything, but her power of showing her love for Lettice—though she did this in every way she could think of.

And so I will leave this good, sensible, God-fearing girl for the present,

“Blessing and blest in all she does,”

and tell you how Myra went to Mrs. Fisher, and something about that lady.

CHAPTER VII.

Bless the Lord, oh my soul! and all that is within
me bless his holy name ;

Who forgiveth all thy iniquities and healeth all thy
diseases,

Who saveth thy life from destruction, and crowneth
thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.

PSALM CIII.

MRS. FISHER.

I MUST now introduce you to Mrs. Fisher—
she is so great a favourite of mine, that before
I relate what became of Myra, I must make
you acquainted with this lady.

Mrs. Fisher was a respectable, gentlewoman-like personage of about fifty-four, of a grave, authoritative, and somewhat severe aspect; but with the remains of very extraordinary personal beauty, which she had once possessed in an eminent degree. She was somewhat above the middle size, of an erect, firm, full figure, her hair, now gently turning grey, drawn over her finely proportioned forehead; her eyes large, and of a fine colour and form—clear and steady; her mouth expressive of sense and temper; and her dress in character with the rest. Mrs. Fisher was always handsomely dressed in silks of the best description, but in slight mourning, which she always wore; and on her head, also, a cap rather plainer than the mode, but of the finest and most expensive materials: nothing could be more dignified and complete than her appearance.

When first Myra was introduced to her, she was both daunted and disappointed. The gravity, amounting almost to sternness, with which Mrs. Fisher received her, and explained to her the duties she was expected to perform, awed in the first place, and mortified in the second. The establishment of this fashionable modiste, with which Myra had associated nothing but laces and ribbons, dresses and trimmings, embroidery and feathers, flattery and display, struck cold and dull upon her imagination. She was introduced into a handsomely but very plainly furnished sitting-room, where not one trace of any of these pretty things were to be seen, and heard of nothing but regularity of hours, persevering industry, quaker neatness, attention to health, and the strictest observance of the rules of what she thought quite a prudish propriety.

Mrs. Fisher's life had been one of vicissitude, and in its vicissitudes, she, a strong, earnest-minded woman, had learned much. She had known sorrow, privation, cruelly hard labour, and the loneliness of utter desolation of the heart.—She had, moreover, been extremely beautiful, and she had experienced those innumerable perils to which such a gift exposes an unprotected girl, struggling for her bread, under the cruellest circumstances of oppressive labour. Every description of hardship, and every description of temptation belonging to perhaps the hardest and almost the most dangerous position of female life, Mrs. Fisher had gone through.

She had outlived its sufferings and escaped its snares.

The suffering, thanks to the finest constitutions in the world; the snares, thanks to

what she always, with inexhaustible gratitude, acknowledged as the special mercy and providence of God.

An orphan at the dangerous age of seventeen, the lovely, blooming young creature was placed by her friends in one of the most fashionable and largest milliners' establishments at that time in London, and had found herself at once miserable and excited, oppressed and flattered.

The mistress of this flourishing house, intent upon making a rapid fortune before the years in which she could enjoy it should come to a close, cared little—I might say nothing—for the welfare of the poor creatures whose labours were to construct that edifice. She, in fact, never thought about them.—Want of thought may be pleaded as the excuse, wretched one as it is, for the cruelties of

those days. People certainly had not the claim of common humanity sounded into their ears as it is into all ears now.—A few admirable philanthropists talked of it, and preached it; but it was not to be heard calling in the streets, as it is the triumph of our day to acknowledge, till the hardest heart for very shame is forced to pay *some* attention to the call.

It never entered into Miss Lavington's head that she had any other business with her young women but to get all the work she possibly could out of their hands, and as well done and as speedily done as possible. If she objected to night-work in addition to day-work, it was not in the slightest degree out of compassion for the aching limbs and wearied eyes of the poor girls, but because wax candles were expensive, and tallow ones

were apt to drip ; and there was always double the duty required from the superintendent (her especial favourite), to keep the young women at those times to their duty, and prevent fine materials from being injured.

Oh ! those dreadful days and nights of the *season*, which the poor Lucy Miles at that place went through.

She,—accustomed to the sweet, fresh air of the country, to the cheerful variety of daily labour in her father's large farm, and under the care of a brisk, clever, but most kind and sensible mother,—to be shut up twelve, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, nay twenty hours before a birthnight, in the sickening atmosphere of the close work-room. The windows were rarely opened, if ever ; for the poor young things were so unnaturally chilly for want of exercise and due circulation of the blood, that

they said they should, and perhaps they might, have taken cold if fresh air were admitted. There was nothing they all dreaded so much as taking cold. Those fatal coughs, which every season thinned the ranks, to be filled with fresh victims, were invariably attributed to some particular occasion when they had "taken cold." They did not know that they were rejecting the very cordial of life and inhaling poison when they kept the room so close.

Oh! for the dreadful weariness which proceeds from *in-action* of the limbs; so different from the wholesome fatigue of action. *In-action*, where the blood is stagnating in every vein: *in-action*, after which rest is not rest, but a painful effort of the depressed currents to recover their circulating power,—so diffe-

rent from the delightful sensation of wholesome rest after physical exertion.

At first she felt it almost insupportable. I have heard her say that it seemed at times as if she would have given years of her existence to be allowed to get up and walk up and down the room for a few minutes. The sensation was so insupportable. That craving desire of the body for what it is in want of—be it water, be it bread, be it rest, be it change of posture—is so dreadful in its urgency. The most abominable tortures men have in their wickedness invented are founded upon this fact—tortures that render the black history of Inquisitors yet blacker; and here it was, in one at least of its numerous forms, daily inflicted upon a set of helpless young women, by a person who thought herself per-

fectly justifiable, and whose conscience never pricked her in the least.

Such is negligent moral habit.

Oh! the delight at meal-times—to spring up, I was going to say,—I meant to *get* up,—for there was no *spring* left in these poor stiffened frames. Oh! the delight when the eye of that superintendent was no longer watching the busy circle, and her voice calling to order any one who durst just to raise a head, and pause in the unintermitting toil. Oh! the delight to get up and come to breakfast, or dinner, or tea.

They had not much appetite when they came to their meals, to be sure. There was only one thing they were always ready to enjoy, and that was their tea. That blessed and long-abused tea; which has done more to sweeten private life with its gentle warmth

and excitement than any cordial that has ever been invented. It is but a cordial, however ; it is not a nourishment ; though a little sugar and wretched blue milk, such as London milk used to be, may be added to it. Most of the young ladies, however, preferred it without these additions ; they found it more stimulating so, I believe, poor things !

Such nourishment as they received, it is plain, would ill supply the rapid exhaustion of their employment. One by one, in the course of the season, they sickened and dropped off ; some died out and out ; some, alas ! tempted by suffering and insupportable fatigue, or by that vanity and levity which seems to be too common a result of many girls living together, did worse. There would have been a heavy record against her every June, if Miss Lavington had taken the trouble

to note down what had become of her missing young ladies.

I said they were relieved from their irksome continuance in one posture by going to their meals, and what a relief it was; but they did not always get that. When there was more than usual to be done, their tea would be brought to them where they sat, and there would be no intermission.

So things went on at Miss Lavington's in those days. I wonder in how many establishments of the same description, things go on so now! How many to which that voice of humanity which "calls in the streets" has not yet penetrated!

We shall by-and-by see what was the case in Mrs. Fisher's, but for the present we will go on with her history.

So beautiful a young creature as she was,

could not long escape trials, yet more to be lamented than those of physical suffering.

In the first place, there was the conversation of the young ladies themselves; a whispering manner of conversation when at work; a busy chattering of emancipated tongues during the intervals. And what was it all about?

Why, what was it likely to be about?—love and lovers,—beauty and its admirers,—dress and its advantages,—he and him,—and, Dear me, weren't you in the Park last Sunday? Where could you be? and did you not see the carriage go by? What had you on? Oh, that pink bonnet. I cribbed a bit of Mrs. M——'s blond for a voilette. If people will send their own materials, they deserve as much. I've heard Mrs. Saunders (the superintendent) say so scores of times.—Well, well, and I saw it, I'm certain of it.—Well, did anything come of it?

Alas ! alas ! and so on—and so on—and so on.

And Lucy was very soon taught to go on Sundays into the Park. At first, poor girl, merely to breathe the fresh air and inhale the delicious west wind, and look at trees and grass, and cows and deer once more, and listen to the birds singing. At first she thought the crowds of gaily dressed people quite spoiled the pleasure of the walk, and tried to coax her companions to leave the ring, and come and walk in the wood with her ; but she soon learned better, and was rapidly becoming as bewitched with the excitement of gazing, and the still greater excitement of being gazed at, as any of them.

She was so uncommonly beautiful, that she got her full—and more than her full share of this latter pleasure ; and it was not long before

she had those for whom she looked out amid the crowds upon the ring, and felt her heart beat with secret delight as she saw them.

Then, as her health began to decline, as dislike insupportable for her occupation and its confinement;—as weariness not to be described, came on;—as longings for little luxuries to be seen in every shop which she passed by, for fruit or confectionery, haunted her palled and diseased appetite as the vision of food haunts the wretch who is starving;—as the desire of fine clothes, in which her companions managed to array themselves;—as the more insidious, and more honourable longings of the heart, the desolate heart, beset her—cravings for affection and sympathy;—when all these temptations were embodied together in the shape of one, but too gentle, and insinuating; oh, then it was perilous work indeed!

Her mother had tried to give her a good, honest, homely education; had made such a Christian of her, as going to church, reading a chapter in the Bible on a Sunday, and the catechism, makes of a young girl. There was nothing very vital or earnest about it; but such as it was, it was honest, and Lucy feared her God and revered her Saviour. Such sentiments were something of a defence, but it is to be feared that they were not firmly enough rooted in the character to have long resisted the force of overwhelming temptation.

This she was well aware of, and acknowledged to herself; and hence her deep, pervading, ineffable gratitude, for the Providence which she believed had saved her.

She was getting on very fast on the evil road upon which she had entered. Every Sunday the progress she made was fearful. A few

more, at the pace at which she was advancing, and there would have been an end of it, when a most unexpected accident arrested her in the fatal career.

One remarkably fine Sunday, when all the members of the establishment had been enjoying their usual recreation in the Park,—just as Lucy and some of her giddy friends were coming through Grosvenor Gate,—they saw the superintendent before them.

“There’s that old Saunders, I declare!” cries one. “Stand back a little, won’t ye?—she’ll see our bonnets else, and I’ll be bound she’ll know the rosettes, and where they come from.”

There was time for no more. Mrs. Saunders, who was rather late, being in haste to get home, attempted to cross, as a curricule at full speed came driving down Park Lane, and before the gentleman within could draw up,

the unfortunate woman was under the horses' heels. There was a terrible bustle. The young ladies with the rosettes managed to escape ; but Lucy, who had at least preserved her integrity thus far, and had nothing about her dress not strictly her own, rushed forward, and helped to raise the poor woman ; and declaring she knew who she was, was placed with her by the assistants in the hackney coach in which she was carried home.

Lucy was naturally of a very kind and humane disposition ; and her care of the poor suffering woman during the transit to Miss Lavington's,—united to the kindness and assiduity with which—every one else but the under maid of all being absent—she tended and waited upon her,—so engaged Mrs. Saunders' affection, that afterwards, during the whole of the subsequent illness, which broken limbs and

ribs occasioned, she made it her particular request to Miss Lavington that Lucy might be spared from the work-room to nurse and keep her company ; adding, for that lady's satisfaction, that though the best nurse, and nicest young girl of the lot, she certainly, being the youngest, was the least of a proficient in the peculiar art she followed.

The poor woman lay groaning piteously upon her bed, waiting the arrival of the surgeon. The surgeon, an elderly man, was out of town, and could not attend ; a young man appeared in his place. He had just joined himself to the old man in the quality of assistant and future partner ; and hearing that

the case was one of an accident, and urgent, he hurried to the house, resolving to send for more experienced assistance, if such should be found necessary.

He was shown up-stairs, and hastily entered the room in which the sufferer lay. She was very much bruised about the chest, and she drew her breath with difficulty; and though exceedingly weak and faint, was unable to lie down. She was resting in the arms of one who appeared to the young man like an angel.

The lovely girl, with a face of the tenderest pity, was holding the poor groaning woman upon one arm, bending over her with an air of almost divine kindness, and softly wiping the dew-drops which in the agony came starting upon the patient's brow.

The young man received an impression which death alone effaced, though the bright

visionary glance was only momentary. He was instantly by the side of his patient, and soon with much skill and courage doing what was necessary for immediate relief; though at the very first moment when he had discovered the serious nature of the case, he had begged the young lady to tell Miss Lavington that it would be proper to send for some surgeon of more experience and eminence than himself to take the direction of it.

“Don’t go away,” said Mrs. Saunders, feebly, as Lucy was rising to obey. “Don’t send her away, Mister—I can’t do without her—Miss Lavington’s not at home—one need not ask her for *me*.—Who should be sent for?”

The young man named a gentleman high in his profession. Was it that able and benevolent man whom the world has so lately lost? That kind, frank, manly, courageous man of

genius, whom no one approached but to find help and comfort? I don't know—but be he who he might, when he did at length arrive, he gave the most unqualified praise to the proceedings of our young gentleman, and called the colour to the pale cheek of the young and serious-looking student by his approbation. He finished his visit by assuring Mrs. Saunders that she could not be in safer hands than those in which he had found her, and recommended her to put herself entirely under the charge of the young practitioner; adding an assurance that he would be ready at any instant to come if he should be wanted; and that he would, at all events, call in once or twice as a friend during the progress of the case.

Mrs. Saunders liked the looks of the young man much,—as who did not? and was quite contented with this arrangement, to which,

as I told you, was added the comfort of retaining Lucy Miles as her nurse and companion during what threatened to be a very tedious confinement. Miss Lavington well knew the value of a Mrs. Saunders in such an establishment as hers, and was willing to make any sacrifice to forward her recovery.

So Lucy left the wearying work-room and the dangerous recreations of the Sunday, to sit and watch by the bed-side of a peevish, uncomfortable sort of an old woman, who was perpetually making demands upon her patience and good-nature, but who really suffered so greatly from her accident, that Lucy's pity and kindness were proof against everything. The young surgeon went and came—went and came—and every time he came, this angel of beauty and goodness was ministering by the old woman's bed. And those

eyes of his—eyes of such prevailing power in their almost enthusiastic expression of serious earnestness—were bent upon her ; and sometimes her eyes, soft and melting as those of the dove, or bright and lustrous as twin stars, met his.

He could not but linger in the sick woman's room a little longer than was necessary, and the sick woman unwittingly favoured this, for she took a great liking to him, and nothing seemed to refresh and amuse her amid her pains like a little chat with this nice young man. And then the young surgeon remarked that at such times Lucy was allowed to sit quietly down and amuse herself with a little needlework, and he thought this an excellent reason for making his visits as long as he decently could.

The young nurse and the young doctor all

this while had conversed very little with each other ; but she listened, and he gazed, and that was quite enough. The case proved a very serious one. Poor Mrs. Saunders, superintendent as she was, and not workwoman—Driver, not slave,—yet could no more than the rest escape the deleterious effects of the close work-room. Her constitution was much impaired. The wines and cordials she had accustomed herself to take to support nature, as she thought, under these fatigues, had increased the mischief ; wounds would not heal as they ought ; contusions would not disperse ; the internal injury in the chest began to assume a very threatening appearance. Mr. L. came to the assistance of the young surgeon repeatedly—all that human skill could do was done, but Mrs. Saunders grew alarmingly worse.

For a long time she resisted the evidence which her own sensations might have afforded her, and avoided asking any questions which might enlighten her. She was determined not to die; and, even in a case so awfully serious and real as this, people seem to cling to the persuasion, so prevailing in lighter circumstances, that because a thing *shan't* be, it won't be, and because they are determined it is not, it *is* not. So, for many days, Mrs. Saunders went on, exceedingly angry if everybody did not say she was getting better; and half inclined to dismiss her young surgeon, much as she liked him, because he looked grave after he had visited her injuries.

He *did* look grave, very grave. He was exceedingly perplexed in his mind as to what he ought to do. Young surgeon as he was, fresh from those schools which, alas! so many

who are acquainted with them represent as the very nurseries of infidelity and license, both in speech and action, he was a deeply, seriously pious man. Such young men there are, who, like those three, walking unscathed through the furnace of fire in the faith of the Lord their God, walk through a more terribly destructive furnace—the furnace of temptation—in the same faith—and “upon their bodies the fire hath no power, neither is a hair of their head singed.”

In what tears, in what prayers, in what anguished hope, what fervent aspiration, this sole treasure of a widowed mother, steeped in poverty to the very lips, had been reared, it would be long to tell; but she had committed him to one *never* found faithless; and under that blessing she had found in her pure and disinterested love for the being entrusted to

her charge, that which had given her an eloquence, and a power, and a strength, which had told upon the boy.

He proved one of those rare creatures who pass through every stage of existence, as child, as schoolboy, as youth ; through nursery, school, college, marked as some bright peculiar being—peculiar only in this one thing, sincere, unaffected goodness. His religion had been, indeed, with him a thing little professed, and rarely talked about, but it had been a holy panoply about his heart—a bright shield, which had quenched all the darts of evil : it shone around him like something of the radiance from a higher world. There was a sort of glory round the young saint's head.

Such being the man, you will not be surprised to hear that his practice called forth most serious reflections—most melancholy and

sad thoughts—and in no sick room where he had ever attended more than in the present one.

He could not frequent the house as much as his attendance rendered necessary without being pretty well aware of the spirit of the place ; and whilst he grieved over the ruinous waste of health to which these young creatures were exposed, he was struck to the heart with horror at the idea of their moral ruin.

Mrs. Saunders talked openly and unreservedly, and betrayed the state of mind she was in. So completely, so entirely devoted to, wrapt up in, buried fathoms and fathoms deep in the things of this world. So totally lost to,—so entirely to seek in everything connected with another ; that the large, mournful, serious eye, as it turned to the sweet young creature sitting beside her, thus passing

her daily life in an element such as this, was filled with an expression of sad and tender pity, such as the minister of heaven might cast upon a perishing soul.

She did not quite understand all this. Those looks of interest, so inexpressibly sweet to her, she thought were excited by the view of her position as affected her health and comfort. She thought it was that consumption which, sooner or later, she believed must be her fate, which he was anticipating with so much compassion. She was blind to the far more dreadful dangers which surrounded her.

Poor Mrs. Saunders! At last it could no longer be concealed from her. She must die.

He broke the intelligence to her in the gentlest terms, as she, at last, in a paroxysm of terror, asked the question ; giving her what

hope he could, but still not denying that she stood in a fearful strait. It was a terrible scene that followed. Such a frightful agitation and hurry to accomplish in a few counted hours what ought to have been the business of a life. Such calling for psalms and prayers ; such piteous beseechings for help ; and, last of all, such an awful awakening of a slumbering conscience!

Like Richard's bed, on the eve of Bosworth fight, it seemed as if the spectral shadows of all those she had injured in the body or the soul, by her unerring demands upon one, and her negligence as to the other,—rose a host of dismal spectres round. Their pale, exhausted, pleading looks, as she scolded and threatened, when the clock struck one, and the task was yet undone,—and the head for a moment dropped, and the throbbing fingers were still.

Those hollow coughs in which she would *not* believe,—those hectic flushes that she would not see,—and worse, those walks, those letters, at which she had connived, “because the girls did so much better when they had some nonsense to amuse them.”

What fearful revelations were made as she raved aloud, or sank into a drowsy, dreary delirium. The old clergyman, who attended her, consoled, and reasoned, and prayed in vain. The two young people,—that lovely girl, and that feeling, interesting, young man,—stood by the bed, appalled: he, ghastly pale,—pale with an agony of despairing pity,—she, trembling in every limb.

The death agony!—And then that poor woman went to her account. There was no one in the room but themselves; it was late in the night, the morning, indeed, began faintly

to dawn. The maids were all gone to bed, glad enough to escape the scene. He stood silently watching the departing breath. It stopped. He gave a deep sigh, and, stooping down, piously closed the eyes. She had turned away in horror and in dread, but shedding some natural tears. He stood looking at her some time, as there she stood, weeping by the bed ; at last he spoke.

“This may seem a strange time to choose, but I have something to say to you. Will you listen to me ?”

She took her handkerchief from her eyes, and gazed at him with a wondering, grave sort of look, as a child might do. His voice had something very remarkable in it.

He passed to the side where she was standing, and said, “I am a very, very poor man, and I have a helpless mother entirely depen-

dant upon me for support—and, if it were my last morsel of bread—aye, and wife and children were perishing for want of it—It is *she* who should have it.”

She only looked at him wondering like.

“This is a fearful precipice upon which you stand. That poor creature has sunk into the gulf which yawns beneath your feet. May God, in his mercy, look upon her! But you, beautiful as one of heaven’s angels,—as yet pure and sinless as a child,—must you fall, sink, perish, in this mass of loathsome corruption? Better starve! better die!—far, far better!”

“Alas, alas!” she cried, with a scared and terrified look,—“Alas! alas! ten hundred thousand times better. Oh, what must I do?—what must I do?”

“Take up your cross: venture upon the

hardships of a poor man's wife. Discard all the prides, and pomps, and vanities,—the vain, vain delusions of flattery ; trample upon the sin, triumph over the temptation. Put yourself under the protection of an honest man, who loves you from his soul. Starve, if it must be—but die the death of the righteous and pure.”

She gazed at him, amazed ; she did not yet understand him.

“Marry *me*. Come to my blessed, my excellent mother's roof.—It is homely, but it is honest—and let us labour and suffer together, if need be. It is all I can offer you—but it will save you.”

The arms, the beautiful arms were expanded, as it were, in a very agony of joy. The face ! oh, was it not glorious in its beauty then ! Did he ever forget it ?

And so the contract was sealed, and so she was rescued from the pit of destruction into which she was rapidly sinking.

And this it was which had excited such impassioned, such lasting, such devoted feelings of gratitude—towards Him who rules the course of this world—in a heart which had only to be shown what was good to embrace it.

END OF VOL. I.

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